

STRANGE FRUIT

By Phyllis Bottome

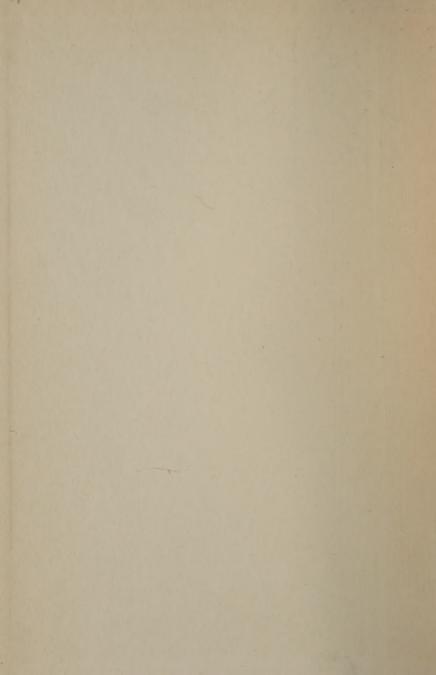
PHYLLIS BOTTOME, recognized as a novelist of distinction, shows in these short stories all the skill and the insight which have characterized her longer work.

'Strange Fruit' contains twenty tales which are remarkable in the variety of their interest. Miss Bottome is primarily occupied with people and the hidden currents which guide their lives. So she tells of domestic comedy and domestic tragedy, portraying always the strange quirks of human nature, the secret realities which outweigh circumstance.

These are entertaining stories, amusing sometimes, sometimes pathetic. But more than this they stand as studies of character written with understanding and reflection.

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PHYLLIS BOTTOME





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Stories BY PHYLLIS BOTTOME



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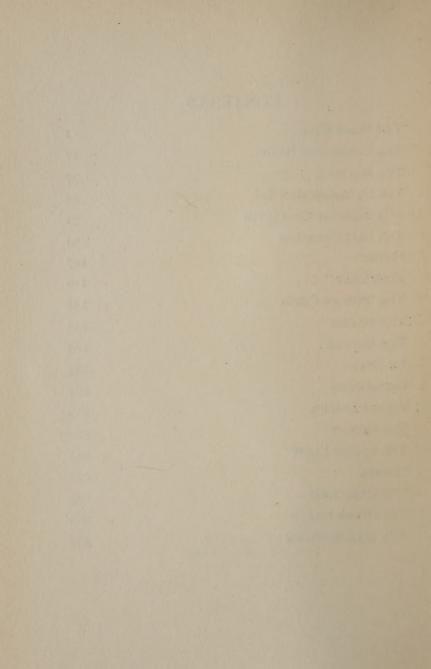
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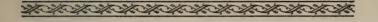
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STRANGE FRUIT

THE PLAIN CASE





STRANGE FRUIT

THE PLAIN CASE

'Is there such a thing as a plain case?' asked Charles Massingham, thoughtfully,

We were sitting in the smoking-room at Medlars. Bridge was over for the evening, and the women had gone to bed. It was an hour when, if you start talking, no one wants to leave off.

The French windows were open to the smooth shadow of the lawn, and moths haunted the pergola where the June roses hung a little stiffly in the still air, like bunches

of black grapes.

'There it was in the paper,' Charles went on, in his slow, even voice; 'plain case of suicide, unrequited affection; all put down chock-a-block to the poor girl - and yet I never believed she had a thing to do with it! And you'll find the same flaw in any newspaper report you take up, or in any friend's confidence, for that matter. The plainer the case looks, the more all the cards are spread out for you on the table, the more certain you can be that the point of the whole thing has been hushed up. You can't make any rule about it. The person blamed most is sometimes innocent, and sometimes guilty of something entirely different, and sometimes, of course, there's nobody to blame at all. You might make a good covering principle that all passionate crimes are due to jealousy - most of them are. But if one of them set out to be a clear case of jealousy, be careful you don't find that this particular one isn't. Pure boredom, perhaps or pride — or the sudden click upward of one of Freud's famous suppressions. But whatever it is hasn't been put in the papers, and won't get into a confidence either, because what most people tell you a confidence for is to get something off their chest which hasn't really been on it. They don't necessarily want to hide the truth from you, but they're out to hide it from themselves. The most honest person in the world won't tell you the whole truth about his own love affair if it's gone wrong. He doesn't know there is any more to it than what he wants to see. The reason, that was at the root of his wanting to see it, got away in time. Alan Menteith's was a very plain case. If it wasn't the girl, who could it have been? The passionate love letters, the discovery, the enforced separation; and then he goes and lies down under an express train, and six feet of the best English manhood has to be mopped up off the permanent way.

'He was head of his house at games, safe for at least one blue, perfectly fit, perfectly wholesome, not a drop of bad blood in him. He had that type of English beauty which makes a Greek statue look puffy; and when he was twenty-one he would have come into five thousand a

year and "Rickets."

'He was just eighteen, an unfortunate age — no padding at all between you and the universe — instincts mature and running blind. I'd known him since he was a baby. His father, Jack Menteith, was my best friend, killed in 1916; and he made me co-guardian with his wife for his three children, two boys and a girl; but the girl doesn't come into this story.

'I suppose some of you remember Audrey Menteith? One of those starry, ultra-feminine, love-in-the-mist

women I never could get on with.

'I can't say I knew Alan very well — only well enough to stick surreptitious half-sovereigns into his not very open fist, and take him at stated intervals to pantomimes. I used often to wish that twenty years' difference in age didn't padlock the tongue.

'Martin, the younger son, I couldn't do with at all. He was a Galahad on the qui vive to talk about it. It was Audrey's fault, of course; she sat on his bed at night, and they told each other everything. It was pretty hard on Alan, because he was the type of boy who can only talk to his mother about cricket or his trousers. I always thought that for a clever woman Audrey was stupid about her eldest son; she overlooked his heart. I know she had it; but just because he never said, "Ah, Mother, how wonderful you are!" she was under the impression that she'd missed fire with him, and that he was therefore mentally and morally deficient.

'When you watch a being, who has always been plainsailing, begin to shuffle and lie, get out of things he needn't get out of, and into things he needn't get into, you may be sure he is being badly handled. Until he was fourteen I knew what to think of Alan; he was Jack without the élan. He couldn't put himself across as lack could, but there were the same things to put across — a kind of courage that amounted to carelessness, a heart so tender he had to hide it, and a jolly sense of humour to keep him sane and tidy. I don't think I was biased about him: his private schoolmaster. Beaton, summed him much the same as I did.

"I should call him the natural man," he said to me; "instincts healthy, pretty stiff attacks of pride, plenty of sport in him, and — of course — close as a fish; but you rather have to be, you know, if you are as sensitive as all that and want to appear normal."

"You think he is sensitive, then?" I asked. "His mother thinks he's rather on the stony side - says his

soul isn't awake yet, whatever that may mean."

"Oh, damn mothers!" groaned Beaton; "why can't

they leave souls alone?"

'But you don't have eyes like a Botticelli angel's and leave souls alone — you prise them open like ovsters.

'What Audrey was particularly keen about was ideal love. I think she rather overdid the pure-as-a-lily stunt myself. She'd married old Menteith, the man she wanted to marry at nineteen, and she was rather proud of not knowing what the word sex meant. I've no doubt she was all her married life exactly what she ought to have been — most women were in those days; but if you are determined to be a blend of the Madonna, Joan of Arc, and Helen of Troy, you'll have to break down somewhere. One of those careers is enough for most women; Audrey wanted to walk away with them all.

'What she felt about love, she swamped the boys in. Martin lapped it up like milk, and wrote poems about it. Alan was rude whenever it was mentioned, but believed in it. At least he went to public school believing in ideal love.

'Personally, I think it's a good way to let a child start right in with the laws of Nature before he's old enough to be surprised at them. A boy of four doesn't see any more difficulty in a stone going up into the air than he sees in its coming down. At that age nothing in Nature's repertoire is going to disconcert him. Later on, as the mind develops, he may be put off life altogether by the clumsy explanations of older people who have forgotten the modesty of youth, or by the slightly less harmful indecency of their more knowing contemporaries.

'Both these things happened to Alan. His housemaster at Eton was a bluff, short-cuttish man, and twenty years' successful tyranny had toughened a hide none too thin to start with. He had reduced his preliminary interview with new boys to a formula. In nine cases out of ten I dare say the formula worked; Alan's was the tenth case.

'The only direct confidence I ever received from Alan was on the subject of Abbots. He said to me in a low voice, as we were crossing those playing-fields of Eton which we are told furnish us with our most brilliant victories, but which we have not been so often told furnish us with our worst defeats, "I think Abbots is a swine."

"What makes you take such an extreme view of him?" I ventured to ask.

'Alan said he didn't know; then as I ceased to pursue the subject, he added: "But I shan't have a ghost of a chance with him. He makes me sick, and I let him see it."

'This was most unfortunate, for housemasters who have been made to see that they make a boy sick seldom take much interest in his future. Intervention being. however, worse than useless, I said nothing and waited. I waited for two years; then one evening, when Alan in all the dignity of his first dress clothes was dining with me alone at my club, he dropped an illuminating remark: "I don't think," he said, "do you, that anyone has any damned right to tell a fellow, however young he is, things he doesn't want to know about himself?" "What kind of things?" I asked. "Oh, you know!" said Alan. So I supposed I did. "You would rather learn your psychology from a book?" I inquired. "Oh, much rather, "Alan agreed, "I don't mind facts, as long as they aren't about oneself, I mean; but I don't see the use of talking about things like that at all. Why should you, if you've been decently brought up? Everything you come across is much the same in the end, isn't it?"

'I rather shirked this startling generality, but I was, for obvious reasons, unable to dispute it. One was that I did

not think Alan had been properly brought up.

'Very soon afterwards came the deplorable incident of the motor-bicycle. I'm not going to defend Alan. He bought this disgusting article (it was the best of its kind, no doubt) with his own money; but he hid its existence both from his mother and Abbots. It lived in a kind of Rosamond's bower, at a low pub out of bounds, and Alan visited it whenever he was free to do so. He rode it like the devil, and no doubt it was upon its dismal trail that the perpetual lies which undermined the confidence of his elders first broke out. 'Still, he hadn't stolen the motor-bicycle; he hadn't even invented the infernal thing, nor did he kill anyone by its use; so that I think the attitude they all continued to take was excessive.

'Audrey sold the motor-bicycle over his head, and put the money in the bank till he came of age. She reminded him of his father's death, that he was her eldest son, and wound up by saying he had destroyed her trust in him. These were his main defences, and she took them ruthlessly away.

"You know, sir," he told me after the blow had fallen, "it nearly broke my heart to part with my bike—
I mean I really was awfully cut up. You see, I had planned round it all the jolly things I ever meant to do."

"Well, you know," I reminded him, "women never do quite understand what men put into their hobbies. They generally exaggerate our faults and minimise our temptations; and no doubt we do the same about theirs."

"Oh! but it was the lies she minded," Alan hastened to explain. "You see, old Martin never tells her lies, and I

do it - well, roughly, twenty times a day."

'The girl arose out of the motor-bicycle accident, but unfortunately she was not discovered quite so soon. Alan ran into her one dark night to avoid a tram; he was going at about seventy miles an hour, and the girl was riding behind the tram and came out on the wrong side. I don't know why he didn't kill her — it would have been simpler if he had. He rushed into the nearest chemist's for help for the girl, and then fainted, having overlooked the fact that his jaw was broken, his shoulder dislocated, and that he had a pretty deep cut from his thigh to his ankle. The girl had been momentarily stunned, but was quite uninjured.

'When Alan came round, his head was on her heart, and he was looking up into a pair of very fine forget-me-not blue eyes fringed with dark lashes. I don't suppose he noticed that their owner said "Ow!" before she asked him if he was all right.

'He fell deeply — ideally, of course — in love with her. They exchanged addresses, and as soon as he was out of the hospital they made friends. She was a clerk in a post office, and had a young man who lived at Ipswich.

'When I went to see her after the accident she told me all about it.

"Mr. Menteith and me were never more than friends," she told me. "He did write me all those funny letters, I know; but that was just his way — a pen in his hand seemed to run away with him. On the spot he never called me anything stronger than Hettie. My young man at Ipswich made no objections. You have your afternoons out, and if you're engaged at a distance, a nice young gentleman offering to go with you is neither here nor there. I drew the line at roses in January; and he saw me home never later than ten o'clock. He never told me he went to school — nor you wouldn't think it to look at him, would you? I'm sure I meant no harm, he was the kind that would as soon fall off a cliff as kiss a girl without asking."

'She was perfectly right, of course, but unfortunately neither Audrey nor Abbots took a common-sense view. If they'd overdone their severity about the motor-bicycle, it was nothing at all to what they did after Abbots had obligingly read Alan's impassioned correspondence from cover to cover. It was the very kind of ideal love which Audrey had been at pains to teach him. But did she recognise it when she saw it? Not a bit of it! She treated him, and continued to treat him, much as King Arthur, according to Lord Tennyson's version, treated Guinevere:

'Oh, golden hair, with which I used to play Not knowing ——'

'This is a particularly trying method when there has

been nothing to know. As for Abbots, it gave him a perfect excuse for getting rid of a boy who had never liked him.

'Eventually, when they'd quite done with him, they sent him along to see me. I told him to take a pipe, and suggested that we should let the matter drop. Rather to my surprise, this did not seem to suit him. He looked up at me with eyes like old Jack's, good as Sheffield steel, and said: "I was awfully in love with her — but not like that."

'I didn't ask him if he was still in love with her, but I always rather fancied he wasn't. I think the whole thing had been such a shock to him that he had ceased to con-

tain any emotion except a general disgust.

'Audrey invited me to dinner to discuss what was to become of him. There were two plans for his future: one that he should go straight to Oxford, and one that he should travel for a year with a tutor. As the tutor was to be chosen by Abbots, and the idea of going abroad was to my mind too obviously mooted to replace by compulsion the vision of Hettie, my backing was for Oxford. Just as naturally, of course, Audrey and Abbots were for the universe shackled by the tutor.

'I have never forgotten that little dinner party. It was one of those deadly pieces of civilised life where the polish on the surface is like a torture engine suspending beyond its natural length the stretched-out emotions of man. The dining-room was a low, oak-panelled room, with a long, rather fine table, the shape of the one in Leonardo's "Last Supper"; the well-cleaned silver shone like moonlight on the black oak; in the centre of the table was a dim blue-glass bowl that looked like an imprisoned wave; a few orange flowers floated in it. There wasn't too much light in the room, and Audrey wore the dress she sat in for Severin's portrait. The portrait itself was in the room, capitally hung and very well lighted. Alan sat with his

back to it, and from start to finish of the meal he never opened his mouth. He was in disgrace, of course, so I supposed it was the natural thing for him not to talk, but even then I thought there was something odd in the quality of his silence. It was as if he wasn't really silent with Martin or with me. He exchanged glances with us, and listened to what we said; but when Severin or his mother spoke, he pulled the silence over his head to shut them out, like a man in a panic pulling the bedclothes over his head to keep off a ghost.

'I cannot describe to you the impression I felt of a something he wouldn't see — wouldn't think about — wouldn't admit. Martin was charming. I think he was very fond of Alan — much more fond of him than he would have been if Alan had been a success. There was a very strong bond between the brothers, though Alan missed making the most of it because he was aching with resentment. It wasn't, I think, that he was jealous of anything Martin had; it was of his being Martin, and therefore able to receive all the things Alan could never take.

'Severin was a miracle of savoir faire, witty and tactful, only showing here and there with a studied diffidence the edge of his triumph. One couldn't be surprised if Audrey liked him too much; his piercing, waylaying eyes saw, and hid everything they saw. His slow, enchanting smile was created to act as an ally to women; it pulled them out of every difficult situation into which it had previously plunged them. How far the Severin and Audrey affair had gone I shall never know — I can only tell you what happened afterwards.

'Severin with easy tact melted away; Martin strolled off to practise his saxophone. Audrey sat on a high-backed oak chair, very still, with her beautiful hands clasped loosely in her lap. Alan stood by the mantelpiece and played with a green jade dragon. Audrey put before

us very succinctly, with only one or two side-looks at

Alan, the two courses open to him to follow.

"We should like, of course, my dear Charles," she finished, "before we decide anything, to hear your opinion."

'I spoke slowly and carefully, for although I could not see much beyond the back of his head, one ear, and the line of his chin, I am under the impression that Alan was listening intently.

"He's to go up to Oxford next term, or round the world

with Abbots's man, is he?" I demanded.

"Mr. Abbots has very kindly suggested someone suitable," she corrected me. "He is naturally familiar with the opportunities in scholastic circles which you, dear Charles, I know, are *not*; and you can see how important it is for Alan not to waste any more time."

"Well," I said, "why can't you let Alan decide for

himself? - he's old enough."

'She raised her beautiful arched eyebrows and glanced at her son. I wonder she wasn't touched, for I never saw a better-looking boy. To-night he looked even younger than usual — more exposed — as if his beauty was a defenceless thing. His head was bent above the green jade ornament, the firelight flickered over his face; his expression was inscrutable. We might have been talking about something that had nothing to do with him — perhaps we were.

"Alan," she said gently, "has not proved himself the

best judge of his own interests."

"There's nothing final about a mistake," I reminded her, "except its being taken as final. As these two suggestions were your own, Alan can hardly go wrong in choosing one of them; and if you ask my opinion, I should say that whichever the boy prefers would be best for him. Come, Alan, haven't you got any preference?"

'I was determined to make him speak; I felt as if some-

thing momentous depended on it. He raised his eyes very slowly from the green jade dragon and met mine; they held all the weariness, all the hopeless, tragic wistfulness of seventy years of failure. It was unnatural and horrible to see in those young eyes such old despair.

"Thanks," he said quietly. "I don't think it matters

to me in the least what is arranged for me."

'Audrey didn't say "I told you so!" She refrained from pointing out either his sullenness or her own triumph. But these things were in the air: her judgment of him, her ruthless clarity of vision, and something more. I couldn't tell what it was at first; that distant, high-pitched braying of the saxophone, like the uncouth but earnest voice of a profoundly moved donkey, confused my senses. But as Alan looked away from me, gave up even the pretence of an interest in his ornament and laid it down on the mantelpiece, I knew what it was. Shame was in that room with us — a disconcerting, fundamental shame, far out of proportion to anything which could have been produced by Alan's slightly speckled record.

'Audrey didn't feel it. She was unaware of anything except the familiar way in which everything that happened played into her hands. As Alan steered his way to the door without once glancing at his mother, he threw me a jerky "Good-bye, sir," over his shoulder — and a look in which I read an appeal not to go on about it. So I didn't go on about it. How often I have wished I had!

'The next day I received the letter I had to read out later at the inquest. I remember every word of it.

DEAR MASSINGHAM,

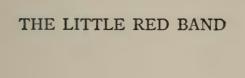
I am writing to you because I don't know anyone else I care to ask. Would you go and see Hettie for me after the fuss is over and explain to her with my love that it had nothing at all to do with her? I swear it hasn't. It was something else which upset me; it made it seem silly

to go on living. Anyhow, Martin will look after the old place better than I should. He ought always to have been the eldest son.

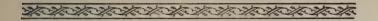
Yours affectionately
ALAN MENTEITH

'The coroner discounted the evidence in my letter, because Abbots, who was one of the witnesses, pointed out that Alan was a notoriously untruthful boy; but I believed every word of it. There was an attacked philosophy behind that phrase, "it made it seem silly to go on living." Hettie could attack hearts, but she was, I am sure, one of those women who are innocuous to philosophies. Jealousy of Martin may have come into the business, but I don't think it was a decisive factor. Alan would not have mentioned the person who was the direct cause of his suicide. You notice, of course, that there was one person never alluded to in that letter - not even to send her his love - for Alan left no other messages. Did he, when he came back from school in his innocent disgrace, with his half-broken career before him, and only his unfledged heart to pit against the indecency of life. read into that Severin business what the world had read? Youth takes disillusion hard; and he had built his life out of his unsullied veneration for Audrey. It wasn't. either, as if she had only slipped - she had slipped the whole way down; and condemned him, after she had done it, for a mere warm-hearted blunder. Of course you may take the modern view that Audrey was perfectly free to make her own arrangements with Severin; or you may take an even more charitable view - that there was no arrangement at all, only a bit of ill-natured London scandal attached to a particularly high-minded woman. But if that wasn't Alan's view, if he believed that, while exiling him in disgrace for an abortive fancy, she was deliberately sharing the forbidden fruit with Severin, I think it was enough to make the precipitate shock of that express train merciful. Anyhow, next time you go and look at the Severin portrait—and he has it on show at the Grafton next week—tell me what you think of my "plain case." If you don't agree with me, you'll have seen an extraordinarily beautiful woman—and that's always something, especially if you have escaped the privilege of being her unloved son.'









THE LITTLE RED BAND

It is odd how little people suggest their histories. I was once staying in a hotel at the same time as a public character who had involved England in a serious small war. A waiter by mistake pointed out to me, as the origin of the war, a big, hulking fellow with a black beard and ferocious eyes. I made his acquaintance and led the conversation tactfully round to the country he had overturned. He looked very vague and volunteered a practical but uninteresting statement about the price of bullocks.

I discovered afterwards that he was a farmer, and that the gentleman responsible for the war was a small, whitehaired, shrivelled person who looked like a rabbit and drank nothing but milk.

Nor was there any striking peculiarity about my table companion at the *Chat Noir*. I always go to the *Chat Noir* for my meals in Paris, partly because the prices are modest and the cooking beyond reproach, and also because the world one sees there is purely French of a quiet and discreet kind.

My table companion was of precisely this type, and I did not give him a thought until the night of the Armistice.

The café was full that night, and all the people in it had that look of surprised and almost humble triumph which was so soon to be changed into arrogance and bad temper.

Everybody had got something safe; even the deepest mourner believed that his dead had not died in vain; and no one had yet discovered how disintegrating small troubles can be when big ones have stopped.

But the Frenchman whose seat was opposite mine did not share that relieved, slightly bewildered look. He was very quiet, quieter than any Frenchman I have ever met; but he was not relieved.

He came in as usual, hung his hat on the wall, turned the tap of the *cuvette* over his hands, and sat down at our table without smiling. His head was bent, and I found it curiously difficult to tell his age from his features. They were a little blurred, and when I thought about him afterwards, it was only to remember that he had very deep-set, sunken eyes. He had a way, too, of looking at his food as if he were eating dust. I have always made a study of manners, and it struck me that though my table companion was shabbily dressed and inconspicuous-looking, he must have come from a good family. He had little unconscious ways that only people used to a certain social position affect; and although he gave very small tips, the waiters obeyed his nod in a flash.

We had not spoken to each other previously, beyond a formal bow and to wish each other a good appetite, but I could not sit in silence on so tremendous an occasion. The whole café was in a hubbub of delighted sound, and the

Patron had brought out free champagne.

'I am English, monsieur,' I observed, 'and as an ally of your famous nation, it would give me pleasure to shake hands and to drink with you to the perpetual welfare of both our countries!'

He raised his eyes and looked at me. It was a perfectly steady look, and without fear, but it was the kind of glance that seemed to sum up a man's chances, as if all his facilities were on the alert and judging if they were to be called out or not. A captain who expects a collision at sea might look as he looked, a moment before the collision took place. Then he answered me in perfect English.

'I am very happy,' he said courteously, 'to have the opportunity of drinking to your country and of thanking you for the good wishes you have spared for mine.'

I said something about the making of history, and he smiled a curious, tired smile and said: 'History that is made out of weapons is not very intelligent.'

I am not a militarist, but I thought his remark was

singularly out of place at the moment.

'I am happy to be in Paris just now,' I said, 'for without overestimating the parts we have each of us played in the war, France has been the heart, and it is to the heart one turns at such an historic instant.' I looked around me as I spoke.

There was an old man at the next table weeping quietly; he had the Légion ribbon in his coat, and had lost an only son; but for the moment he was not unhappy. Near him a mother sat hand-in-hand with a big young poilu; both of them were laughing with joy while the tears ran down their cheeks.

I counted the *militaires* in the restaurant — twelve men, all young, who needn't die in a few weeks or days — and the light of it was in all their faces.

But in the face of the man opposite to me there was no answering light.

'Ah, yes,' he said, in answer to my words, 'Paris, as monsieur justly observes, is the heart, and in six months' time she will be the greedy, discontented, rather vindictive heart of our "belle alliance." The tears will have dried then, and you will not hear any more laughter. There is one quality that never lasts, monsieur, it decays as quickly as leaves; and that is human gratitude. Dogs remember, but men forget. It is true that the war has stopped; but there are one or two little evils which will still go on. Such as egoism, for instance; greed, for instance; tyranny, for instance! To-morrow these people will remember that they have lost nearly half their natural wealth, and more than a million of their young men. They will reckon up what they have left, and try to produce more at each other's expense. And the dead

men? — ah, well! the dead have paid for this war; they are gone.'

He made a strange little gesture, crumbling his bread and letting it slip through his fingers.

I think I said something about victory.

'Victory — yes?' he repeated. 'And honour — yes—! but these are words which live in the air, and do not matter compared to a corn on your foot when it is stepped on. Monsieur, a hungry dog will not thank you for a silver collar when he wants a bone. The little girl dancing on the table over there in her white silk stockings, and crying "Victory," will not find that after to-morrow, victory will bring her another pair of white silk stockings.'

I was a little annoyed at his tone and said: 'But surely, monsieur, even that little girl loves her country. She loves France, and, after all, victory means the safety of

France!'

'Ah, bah! Safety!' my companion murmured in his tired, soft voice, 'that is a little thing which goes out as quickly as a match. But forgive me, monsieur; I think I am rather outside the occasion. Let us drink to our two countries—I think your toast was "their perpetual welfare"?'

He raised his glass to mine; and when he had drunk, he

threw the glass over his shoulder onto the floor.

This gesture pleased the whole café; everyone decided to do the same. The room filled with the shrieks of excited girls and the crash of glasses. I found myself seized by both hands and made one of a circle which danced and sang. It is unusual for bank managers to dance compulsorily in cafés, and I never sing; but I believe I did both on this occasion; and when it came to an end, I found my table companion had vanished.

He was there the next day, and after this we never failed to have a little friendly conversation together. I found he had been everywhere. He was as familiar with Constantinople as if it were on Mont Parnasse, and he knew India and China as if they were the suburbs of Paris.

When I gave him my card with my London and Paris addresses on it, and asked for his own, he told me he hadn't got a card, and that his name was Adolphe Fleuret; and of course Fleuret is not a name. He added after a short pause that he was a professor of archæology.

Shortly after this he stopped coming to the café. I waited a few days and then I asked the Patron where my former table companion lived. The Patron lifted his expansive shoulders and shook an emphatic but non-

committal head.

'Monsieur means his compatriot who speaks like a Frenchman?' he demanded. 'He came and went like a bird. I do not know where he lives. But, however, he paid punctually.'

'But surely,' I exclaimed, 'he is a Frenchman; he is

certainly not an Englishman.'

'A Frenchman—ah! I think not,' observed the Patron. 'There are many strangers now in Paris—he may, for all I know, be an Arab; but we had supposed him to be an Englishman.'

'He speaks English extraordinarily well,' I acknowledged. 'But he isn't English; there is something in his way of expressing himself which is certainly not Anglo-

Saxon.'

'That,' exclaimed the Patron, 'is precisely the way he speaks French. Well — but not as we speak it ourselves. Besides, has monsieur ever seen a Frenchman look at a pretty woman as if she were an object that had inadvertently got between him and the light? One of my clientèle was so shocked at the way in which he regarded her that she rushed out to buy a new hat — but that too passed him. It is quite possible he is an Arab. I understand their women wear veils, not hats.'

I saw nothing more of Monsieur Fleuret for over a year. I had returned to London; it was Boxing Night and I was alone in my flat. I heard the thrill of my electric bell, and when I opened the door, there stood Adolphe Fleuret, covered with snow. I took him in, settled him before the fire, and poured him out a stiff grog.

'You ought to have let me know you were coming,' I said reproachfully. 'If it hadn't been for an accident, I should have been staying with friends in the country over Boxing Day, and if it had not been Boxing Day, I

might have been at work.'

Adolphe Fleuret covered me with his steady, slightly ironic glance. 'Ah,' he said, 'but in England it is always Boxing Day, and I live on accidents. I had an idea that you would have a cat, and I see that you have a very fine one!'

Paul, my blue Persian, had been sitting on an armchair opposite to me. I had to remove him for my visitor, and I expected him to show annoyance, but to my surprise he rubbed his handsome arched back against M. Fleuret's leg, and purred with a deep, reverberating purr.

'You seem extraordinarily fond of animals,' I said, 'and even insects. Do you remember at the *Chat Noir* when I wanted to kill a cockroach, you stopped me by

saying you had seen too many things killed?'

'Did I say that?' he asked. 'It was a slip, a weakness; but it was the truth. Now it is a year since the war was ended. Do you remember how I prophesied to you the evils that would follow the Armistice? You have noticed all these troubles since? Look ahead and ask yourself, is it Peace then that you have got? Ah, my friend, the world is just as it was before the war; only it is weaker. Some who held good cards then, hold bad cards now—that is the only difference. To-night I have come to show you my bad hand. You were friendly and agreeable to me in Paris, also you were unconsciously very useful.

I left abruptly without a farewell, but I said to myself, if the occasion serves, I will go to him later and relieve his curiosity. I owe him something and I will pay my debt like that. — How did I know you were curious? Oh, you are discreet, and, like all the English, you see that there is somewhere for you to put your foot before you lean your weight on it; and I saw that you were looking for somewhere to put your foot. I could not satisfy your curiosity in Paris. Cafés do not hold secrets well: not only should I have risked being shot, but what I was doing would have been stopped as well. I am not one of those who die in their beds, but I was anxious about my work. As far as I could do it in Paris, it is done: and in England it is also done. To-night I will tell you anything you like to know. I will drink your very fine whiskey and I will stroke your very handsome cat. Cats are the most discreet of animals. They have soft coats and no hearts. What a philosophy! And how unfortunate that most of us have to part, first with our hearts and then with our soft coats, before we arrive at it!

'You were so kind once as to give me your card, and in return permit me to show you this little remembrance of myself, although I fear it will not remind you of me very much.'

He put into my hand a photograph. It was quite safe for him to carry it about with him, even if he were in danger of being searched, because he was quite unlike the man in the photograph. The man in the photograph was young and very handsome, dressed in a once famous uniform. He held his fine, wild head high. Under the photograph I read the signature, written in a bold, dashing hand. It was the name of one of the Russian archdukes, a cousin of the Tsar. I had read of his assassination in the papers — a queer, horrible story; less queer, less horrible than the truth. I looked at the face before me; the livid blurred face, and the sunk head. I tried to

distinguish the features, and as I tried, M. Adolphe Fleuret rose to his feet, lifted his bent head and gazed back at me, until something, a little spark of likeness, as much as there is between a shadow and he who casts it, came out at me from the photograph.

I think what I missed most in the figure before me was the look of arrogance. The young man in the photograph had his foot on the neck of the world, and the man in front of me had the foot of the world upon his neck. He had no arrogance in his eyes now, only that look as if what he saw in front of him was dust.

He sat down again and drank a glass of nearly neat whiskey. Then he said:

'Yes, that is what people would call — me! and yet it has no more to do with me than it has to do with this very sleek fur animal purring at my knee. Only one little thread binds me to the young man in the picture — one very small thread. I think it is something which is alive in people after everything else is dead. Cut it — and all is over! This little thread is called Revenge — Monsieur — revenge!'

He was stroking Paul as he spoke and he said the word as quietly as if it were a caress, but there was something behind his voice as accurately fatal as prussic acid.

'I ask for neither help nor pity,' he went on slowly, 'and I try only to hurt the precise thing which I wish to hurt; nor am I unreasonable about that Past which once belonged to me. Probably the lot of the peasants in Russia was bad. The Court also was corrupt. The Tsar was too good a man in his private life to see very much beyond it. Family men do not make the best kings. We used to joke about it amongst ourselves, for strict domesticity was not normal in our family. Some of us thought, too, that the influence which played upon him was not altogether wholesome. It is doubtful if the influence of a very good, very narrow-minded woman with a strong

will, is ever wholesome. The rest of us were rich and gav. I had myself twenty households, and I do not know how much money. I never asked, but I spent what I wanted. We made many people happy — and, oh, yes, possibly a good many people miserable. I did foolish things, and foolish things are always a little cruel. Finally I married the most beautiful girl I could find of the rank into which I was obliged to marry. She was, as it happened, good, and not narrow. She had a very little head, but there were fine brains in it. We started hospitals and schools. and improved our estates. She was the mother of my three children, a boy and two girls. I do not know which I loved most, but the youngest girl was the image of my wife. The eldest girl was fifteen, and she, the little Nathalie, was nine; our son was six years old when our world toppled over like a glass that has been filled too full.

'You would be surprised that anything which seemed as strong as the old régime could break so easily. But

there is nothing so brittle or so tough as man.

'We were in the country at the time, about a hundred versts from Moscow. My wife and our three children were with me. I received warning and I could have got them safely out of the country, but my wife would not leave me, and I did not think anything could happen to us in our country house. You see, we had given the people all they had — hospitals and schools; and in the hardest winters we saw the worst evils of our country did not touch them. Not one child died because we did not care.

'I think there were not any of our people who would willingly have lifted their hands against us. But I had not counted on those who had set fire to them as you light dry straw with flame. They came to our village, a little band of them, by night, and talked to our people. I do not know what they said; perhaps that we should drive

them back into the trenches or take away their promised land. It is easy to believe evil when you are ignorant. Russia was wild and these men gave poisoned teeth to it:

and our peasants were bitten and went mad.

'You are an Anglo-Saxon, and you know nothing about a people's madness. I have seen in a St. Petersburg crowd a student tear off another student's ear because he disagreed with his argument. They were intellectuals, but they were infected by the madness of the crowd. And our people were only peasants, and they were infected by this little Red Band.

'You have seen a Russian country house, perhaps? We were there for the summer months, surrounded by woods and large meadows. It was a June night; the sun had been hot on the pines all day, and the meadows were filled with dry hay as sweet as honey. My eldest daughter had been singing to us a little Russian folk-song—like all our music, full of sorrow. We had perhaps twenty people staying with us. I do not remember what happened to them, though I see bits of them sometimes in my dreams.

'The peasants came through the woods with torches. They took me first. I was a strong man then, and I must have given trouble when I felt a peasant's hand on me. They were beyond reason, they could not even hear what I said. The little Red Band of strangers led them.

'I shall not tell you all they did; but I remember perfectly. I remember every single thing that happened to my wife and to my children; I do not think any detail ever escapes me any night of my life. They tied me to a tree with ropes as strong as iron. The peasants went into the house, but the Red Band stayed. There were thirty of them. I called to the peasants to stay too, but they were under the madness of plunder.

'It was the Red Band that took my wife and children, tortured and burned them before my eyes. My wife said my name once, and then God's. She did not speak again. I think she was a saint and went to God quickly. But the children screamed.

'They would not kill me because I went crazy, and they had a superstition against killing those who were mad. They took me away somewhere where I could not kill myself. For six weeks I remained mad. Nothing in my brain lasted, and all my thoughts were as broken as life is broken in a dream. Then one day I awoke in a hospital. I was weak, but I knew everything that had happened, and what was in my brain stayed there, and broke no more.

"You know that in any acute physical pain you cannot feel as if anything of yourself escapes? Not an idea, not the scent of a rose. All the world for you is caught in a net of the same pain? Well — that was what I felt like, only the pain was not physical. My soul was blind with sorrow. Then the idea came to me, and gradually the pain subsided. It was driven out by my idea — not at all quickly, and not at all finally, but some of my life went into the idea as well as into the pain.

'I decided I would not kill myself, that I would even avoid death, until I had accomplished my idea. I had plenty of time to think out my purpose; I was in that hospital for three months, and I had typhoid. All of us

in the hospital had typhoid, and many died.

'I changed my name and my clothes with the dead man next to me. He was very well thought of by the Bolsheviks, and a Jew. I stole his papers and left the hospital; but I did not immediately leave Russia. There were thirty of that Red Band; and I found twenty of them. There are, I regret to say, still ten; but the twenty I killed, one by one, as I found them. They saw my face first. But unfortunately I had to kill them quickly. The rest I could not find.

'But killing them had enlarged my ideas a little; it

seemed to me that I might destroy more than that small Band. The Bolsheviks made propaganda in other countries. I too might make a different propaganda. So I went out of Russia on the papers of that dead Jew.

'My friend the Jew had never been out of Russia, and I lived under his name with fellow-Bolsheviks in Hungary. I worked for Bela Kun, and handed on my information to the Allies. In the end they traced my work back to me and I had to fly. I escaped death by thirty seconds. and found a bullet in my pocket. My name was no longer of any use to me, so I changed it, shaved my beard and went to Paris. I became Adolphe Fleuret, a professor of archæology at the Sorbonne. Archæology had been my hobby in my youth. There was a good deal going on in Paris which the police did not know, and which it was as well for them to learn. So they learned it from me; but not even the police themselves knew who was their teacher. Two members of the Government alone knew my history. I have often been arrested, and once I had some difficulty in being let off; but by being suspect to the police and on all the black lists. I was able to learn more. Still I had to be careful, for even my friends were my enemies.

'The Chat Noir suited me very well, and an Englishman of your established position suited me even better. For a time the police stopped shadowing me, and my other friends found my financial news, with which you were so kind as to furnish me occasionally, very useful. I made for the time the best of both worlds; and earned my bread by teaching archæology, which is the study of

ruins.

'Then an awkward thing happened. I was by way of giving information to a certain high authority. We will not say who; he had an office of the most vital integrity; many belonged to it, but none of us were ever permitted to see each other. It was very important, very serious,

very — what you English call in fun, "Hush! hush!" One day I sent in a report of a private meeting known only to two other Bolshevik leaders and myself; and one of those leaders working in this office — under the Government — read my report of this meeting. It was a little awkward, was it not? — particularly as I had no idea that he had read it.

'I went the next night as usual to the Bolshevik meeting-place. It was in one of those quiet Paris streets off a thoroughfare where the little, close-shuttered houses have high walls and private gardens. I let myself in quietly, and went upstairs to our committee room. They had called in twelve men who worked under us — and all fourteen stood behind the table looking at me. The leader moved forward and said:

"Your report on our meeting has been read by one of us, at the Rue Cyclops. This is your trial, and will be your execution. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"Yes," I said, "I have something. Will you tell me what our comrade was doing at the Rue Cyclops, if it was not precisely what I am doing here? And will you have the goodness to inform me if the wicked bourgeoisie had killed his wife and children before his eyes, to act as a little incentive?"

'They began to argue with each other, and incidentally I discovered which of them had been working in the Rue Cyclops. That decided me to get away. I could not let such a secret die in a Paris sewer.

'Then they faced me again and said: "It does not matter at all why you have betrayed us; it is sufficient that you do not leave this house alive." And one of them, who was annoyed at my irony, perhaps, threw an inkpot at my head. It missed me by the fraction of an inch, but the ink spattered me. I turned angry and put my hand to my breast to reach a heavy cigar case to retaliate with, and they cried out with one accord, "Garde à vous!

He has a revolver!" So I kept my hand there and faced them.

'It was at the hour when we usually dined together at the Chat Noir.

"Gentlemen," I said, "the first who moves — will not move again!" and I slid back till I felt the door handle behind me. I was quick then, for I had to be quick. I owed my life to the fact that I had arrived ten minutes too soon. They were not ready to kill me. But I heard them at my heels. I took the garden in a flying leap, and at the corner I dived straight into a big courtyard to the left of me, I saw a light burning in an upper room and I ran to it. There was a young man sitting and writing at a desk. He wore a khaki uniform. I said: "Behind me are several Bolsheviks, who will kill me in a minute. Promise to go to-morrow to 185 Rue Cyclops and say 46 told you 76 is Prosper Arnot. You need say no more than that. I go."

'The young man replied: "Not on your life. You don't

go! Jump behind this safe."

'I jumped behind the safe, and as I did so the door burst open. It was Prosper Arnot who entered. "Pardon!" he said, "something very serious has taken place. An arrested anarchist has escaped and taken shelter in this building. He is of the utmost danger to the State. We saw him enter this courtyard and he has not come out!"

"Why," said the young officer, "isn't that too bad! But there are two ways out. I guess he must have taken the other one."

"No, no!" said Prosper, "my men are there — you understand — at both doors. Monsieur will have the kindness to let me search the whole building at once!"

"Show me your warrant, then, and search away," said the young officer. "But I won't have any of your men in here. I'm an American officer in charge of this

room, and the things in it must not be touched. I am responsible to my Government for them. You can see for yourself I'm alone; and I'm harbouring no anarchist."

'Prosper Arnot hesitated. You see, as long as I was in danger, he was safe, but if I was safe, he was in danger, and he was a little pressed to find out which of us was safe. I should have liked to see their eyes meet and read each other, but I could see nothing but Prosper Arnot's feet as he moved forward to show the officer the disk we used as a warrant.

" "If he is in hiding and comes in here, by any chance," Arnot urged, "I warn monsieur that he is as dangerous as a snake and carries weapons. It would be safer to leave two of my men here to watch for him."

"I guess you'd be wasting your men," said the American drily. "I'm a handy man with firearms myself; I have a revolver right here, and I'm not anyways gun-shy."

'Prosper breathed a little quickly. Then he went out. He ran soft as a cat up the stairs of the house to the roof, and when he came down, he looked in again—but nothing had changed. He swore under his breath and went out.

'After a long silence the young man got up, shut and locked the door. I got out from behind the safe, and we looked at each other.

"If you are what you say," he said, "you'd better start right away and prove it, and if you're not — don't make any mistake about it — you've seen your finish. I like my Bolsheviks dead."

"Ring up 6781 Rue Cyclops," I said, "and if my story doesn't satisfy you — ask my chief for further particulars; but hurry, for the sooner they know what I have to tell them, the better."

'I needn't have told him to hurry. He had rung up before I'd finished speaking. He moved like a wolf, and he gave me the receiver and covered me with his revolver while I spoke. 'The chief himself answered me. After my experience with Prosper Arnot, he was the only man I would have dared to trust. He had two dead sons. It seemed he already had his suspicions of Arnot. At the end he said: "Yes, that is valuable — are you safe?"

"Not particularly," I said; and with fourteen men waiting for me outside a building where they knew I was,

I do not think that I exaggerated.

"Ah!" he said, "that is a pity, for I cannot do anything to help you. I am anxious not to bring the police into this affair just yet." Then he rang off. He had no further use for me. You see, I had been found out, and for him it was the same if I left Paris or the world. I thanked the American officer. "Satisfy yourself," I said, "and I go. You have served France."

'But no, he would not satisfy himself, that American. "Sure," he said, "you're all right. I reckoned you were from the start. I don't take chances unless I have to. But if you leave this room, you are as dead as Moses."

"That is true," I said. "But I share his privilege; I shall have helped my people forward to the Promised

Land."

"Well, maybe you can help them some more," said the young man. "We're in for an all-night sitting; you may as well tell me something about your work."

'I told him what I thought suitable, and he found it interesting. At one point he observed, "By gosh, Europe is some place!" He used these singular expressions.

"Well, it's evident you can't stay in France," he said when I had finished. "You'd be about as safe here as a naked child in a wasp's nest. I'll get you across the Pond to Brother Bull. But you'll have to hide up a little first, for it'll be hot work getting you out of here."

'He told me then that he was an American Intelligence Officer; and I think that he deserved the adjective.

'Three days later I went out with the young officer

dressed precisely as he was dressed, in a khaki uniform. Three naval gentlemen awaited us at dawn in a swift grey motor, and we travelled across France as a flame licks up sawdust. A few hours later the sea was under us, and I had said good-bye to that pleasant young American whose face was like a child's.'

'And what have you found out,' I asked, 'over here?

Things are disturbed enough?'

'Disturbed, yes,' he agreed. 'But I think you will escape revolution; you will go near it, very likely; you are already nearer it than you know; but life will alter itself here without much bloodshed. You will, I think, yield reasonably to pressure—and what I have discovered is that you should yield. I have worked for a year now in England—in its mines, on railways—and I respect those I have worked with. I find myself wondering whether that Evil I set out to kill is a new evil about to overwhelm the world, or but the result of an old Evil which has already overwhelmed it. Perhaps there would have been no Red Bands if life had been with us less easy, less opulent, less cruel? Think! if what I set out to kill was what I myself had made? This thought has struck me—Was the Red Band their murderer, or was I?'

I told him this was a morbid idea. I begged him to put it away; and to change the subject, I asked him to tell me what he thought of England as a country. He said that he had found it both more stupid and more kind than he had expected. 'Conservative,' he said, 'unintelligent, successful; not very tragic, and on the whole, with many terrible inconveniences for the majority — for the minority the most comfortable country in the world.'

He held out his hand with a little gesture which seemed to close our interview. I found myself rising and standing

before him as if I were his servant.

'Good-bye, my friend,' he said kindly. 'I think your bank will hold — and perhaps — who knows — I, who

care nothing about banks may have helped it to hold. Those are the things one helps — the things one does not care about.'

It was three o'clock in the morning and I urged him to stay the rest of the night, and breakfast with me next morning. But he said that he was about to take a long journey, and that before travelling he always felt a little restless, and would like to go out into the snow.

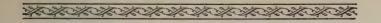
Paul had fallen asleep on his knees, and he had laid the cat very gently on the sofa of my room without waking him. I have never seen Paul acquiesce in anyone's choosing him a place before, but he never even stirred in his sleep. It was curious to think those gentle hands had

killed twenty men.

I wanted, as I have never wanted before, to express something to him of my sympathy with his tragedy; but I belong to a dumb nation, and something in the man himself seemed to prevent it. I never saw him again, but the next day I read in the paper that an obscure anarchist whose alias was known to the police as Mr. Thompson, but who was suspected of being a Russian Bolshevik and the murderer of a Russian archduke, had been discovered lying dead with a bullet through his brain at the corner of the street in which I-lived. There was a photograph of the archduke he had murdered, found upon his person. A revolver lay a few feet away from him, but no one knew whether it was his own or not. There could be no doubt about the photograph, however; it was the one which M. Fleuret had shown me of himself.







THE MIRACLE

PART I

HER poised slim figure made a circle about itself, inside of which no one dared approach. Her quiet manner was as formidable as the moment before Action. There was something in her chiselled features, in the direct glance of her grey and steady eyes, for ever on their guard, which settled the question of intimacy.

She had never married, and if she had loved, she had suppressed the knowledge of it, even from herself. No sensitive man would have risked her scorn, and coarser men, who had pursued her for her physical charms, had

roused in her nothing but animosity.

She admitted to herself that she wanted children: but she admitted it to no one else, and she despised herself for the admission.

Nature struggled hard in her, for she was strong and made to fulfil its laws; but her pride was stronger. She looked squarely at the riches of life, and sent herself

empty away.

Beatrice Everest was a woman of great ability, and none of it had ever been used. She looked after her parents' home, managed their limited income, and battled with the leakage of their infirm lives, with a skill that she hardly realised, it made so little demand upon her energies; it merely prevented her from doing anything else.

'Now, darling, you will begin to live!' her greatest friend ventured to say to her, after Beatrice's last, longparalysed parent had taken a protracted departure.

Beatrice looked at her friend gravely. 'My dear,' she said, 'how do you expect me to do that? Please don't ask me to become an acrobat at the precise moment when the safety mattress has been removed!'

Even after her perfunctory bereavement ebbed, Beatrice continued to look at life with starved, arrogant eyes, and refused to make the slightest effort to pluck any

of its prizes.

But she allowed herself one outlet; she loved the drama. When it was genuinely expressed, it set free in her the emotions she had imprisoned for life. When Hyacinthe de Penthès came to London, caught her public by the heart, and, vanishing, became tradition, Beatrice knew that she had received the deepest impression of her life. As usual, she did nothing about it, except to hide it. When people spoke Hyacinthe de Penthès' name with easy rapture, Beatrice continued to look bored. But she never let the name escape her; she kept every casual press notice of her, every insipid reproduced photograph, every breath and rumour of the astounding, bitterly abbreviated career.

The years passed by and nothing more was known of Hyacinthe de Penthès. Then one day Beatrice heard that the great actress was at bay. The hounds of life were upon her. Ill, alone, penniless, she was left by a world, that once worshipped her, to shift for herself.

Beatrice knew that Hyacinthe would starve, because starving would seem less an affront to her spirit than to present a personal claim. She had ruthlessness enough for her art, but none of the brutality necessary to deal competently with life. 'I,' thought Beatrice proudly to herself, 'have that brutality. I will go and deal competently with life for her. Perhaps I may even bring her back to the world! All I have is very little for such a chance, and all I am — wherever she throws it — is not worth one movement of her divine frail hands. I don't know her, she has never heard of me. The whole attempt is absurd and rather impertinent. But she is a great artist. I owe her the only perfect sensation of my life; if she will let me save her, I shall not have lived uselessly;

and if she will not, I shall be no more useless than I am.'

On her solitary erratic journey she recalled all that she had read and heard of Hyacinthe de Penthès. It was not much, for Hyacinthe de Penthès was the one actress in existence who hated, and had withstood, the revelations of limelight. She came from a family of actors, and from the time she was old enough to speak, she was at home upon the stage. Gradually, in her early teens, the light of her enormous genius broke through her drudgery. She ceased to be a brave little girl working for incompetent relatives, and became Hyacinthe de Penthès working for the world. Things happened to her; life went on about her; but they were far-off things, and life was like the beat of distant surf. Her youth was as simple as a sacrament.

Beatrice revelled in the imagination of those swift pure years. She wished that they could have lasted for ever, that Hyacinthe de Penthès could have evolved from herself the passions that make an actress supreme. But even her genius required the fuel of life, and when Beatrice learned with what grim fuel the fires of Hyacinthe's genius had been fed, her fastidious imagination faltered.

Hyacinthe's surrender had been complete. Love had not played for her one of its light tunes and let her go. It had entered into her heart and her blood, every vein had been filled with inescapable music; great passion had reacted upon great art, until it was impossible for the dazzled observer to tell which was her body and which her soul.

As Beatrice contemplated the flaming course of Hyacinthe's great passion, she felt a mingling of admiration and bitter resentment. She could admire the flood of generosity, the unreckoning courage which had forced her idol into the cruellest of a woman's predicaments, but she

judged with a fierce rage, far more bitter than any anger of the victim herself, the instrument of this other woman's doom. Beatrice had none of the humility of a woman without personal charm; she had always had power if she had chosen to use it. She did not blame men for any of her disadvantages, but neither did she pity them for their own. She judged them with the intolerable harshness of a woman who has neither given nor received the greatest gifts of life at a man's hands.

She thought of Hyacinthe as an immaculate victim, treacherously betrayed. Had not Hyacinthe had more to give than any other woman? A beauty so subtly welded between sense and spirit that a man who possessed her must feel himself half a god; an intellect like an undying flame; a disconcerting integrity, too sure of itself and too generous to calculate or to withhold?

Beatrice had no pity, no indulgence for the recipient of these unbounded gifts. Beneath the weight of these treasures the lover of Hyacinthe de Penthès had been proud at first, and then afraid of the passion he inspired. He was a mortal choked with immortality. The air of Olympus had proved too high for him, and he came down

from it with an ungrateful precipitation.

Never had Beatrice so longed to punish any man as she yearned to punish the recalcitrant lover of the greatest actress in the world. She wished she could be Judith, with the head of Holofernes in her lap; she yearned for the long cruel thrill of Charlotte Corday when she plunged her dagger into the exposed Marat. She would have paid any price of flesh or spirit to bring retribution upon the perfectly secure head of a very normal man.

Hyacinthe had known no such hunger for revenge. When her house of life had fallen, she had fallen with it, and lain still for many years beneath its ruins. She had asked for no compassion in the dust. Beatrice, who had never had anything but her little gusts of maternal feeling

which (with her proud eyes on them) had taken so little crushing, stared aghast at the ruins of a passion that had scattered a life. She had never been able to understand why Hyacinthe de Penthès had not come back to the stage with her powers intact, her sorrow controlled, and no further need of any man.

As she approached Cassis, Beatrice wondered if, after all, this extraordinary being was too wholly unlike herself for any communication between them to take place? They might hate each other at sight, or she might find nothing even to hate? Some poor old woman, like any other poor old woman, menaced by starvation? Her crusading spirit began to feel conscious of a warning chill; she wondered if her habit of suppressing was not, after all, a wise one? Beatrice was between forty and fifty, presumably Hyacinthe de Penthès was even older; surely wild-goose chases belong to the young? At her age one should face one's goose at a table — after the chase was over!

At first it seemed as if Beatrice would find nothing at all in the white lonely village curiously set among white rocks against a line of dazzling blue. It was true Madame de Penthès lived there, in the smallest of the white houses with tightly fastened grass-green shutters, close against the rocks. She lived with an old servant. They were both old; they saw no one. Madame never went out, except to Mass. No one went in. Occasionally there were letters. Madame went to Mass every day, but she wore a black veil. No one saw her face, nor did she ever speak to anyone. Marie — that was the maid — spoke, of course, but only about food and prices. They were like stones, dropped there in the hot sunshine, immovable, silent.

Beatrice spent three weeks at the hotel before anything happened. It seemed to her as if nothing but flies and dust existed. A glare of blue light beat up from the sea and down from the hot dome of the sky. The voices of

the South were harsh in Beatrice's ears; they seemed to be in a perpetual dispute about a grievance which could never be stilled. The light struck like a sword across the jangling little street, and burned the rusty tables where men loitered and drank and played with greasy cards.

The days were very long; the nights were longer. Every morning at six o'clock Beatrice went to Mass and saw the veiled black figure from the tiny white villa. She could not have identified it except for one significant gesture. When Hyacinthe de Penthès used to take her great applause, she bowed as if the whole of dignity was in her drooping shoulders. She held it out towards her audience in her hands. She gave them her dignity in her gratitude. And when this erect, veiled figure bowed before the altar, she gave again her gratitude, her dignity, to God; and Beatrice knew that this was Hyacinthe de Penthès.

Once a week Beatrice brought red roses from Nice, immense sweet roses, red as wine; and these she sent with her card to the little white villa. They were silently accepted. At the end of the third week Hyacinthe responded; she too sent a card, a tiny spidery writing covered it, like fine black lace, but with a wavering pattern. Hyacinthe de Penthès thanked her English friend, and would be glad to see her at five o'clock the next day, if she could put herself out so far as to come to their very small residence. Madame de Penthès begged to be excused from calling herself, as she did not go out.

At five o'clock the cruelty of the light had gone. The heat lay like gossamer spreading a soft golden veil across the white rocks. The blue of the sea dreamed deep. The little white villa and the sharp white rocks around it were like a painted curtain. When Marie opened the door, the curtain lifted; but the stage was dark. For a moment, after the glare outside, Beatrice saw nothing; when her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she made out her

roses; they filled the little empty room. A sofa stood under the shuttered windows, and in the corner of the sofa sat a shadow. Very slowly the shadow rose, and Beatrice, advancing towards it, saw an arrowy form as unsubstantial as smoke, under a crest of silvery hair; but as she moved nearer, she was not conscious of anything but Hyacinthe de Penthès's eyes. She plunged so deeply into them that she felt as if she would never rise to the surface again. Perhaps they had no surface, these deeply set dark eyes? Their darkness was like the darkness of a wood at night, still, impenetrable, full of hidden life. After a time you saw this life moving in them, fugitive and swift. You could never catch it; and at times the night itself rose up in her great eyes, and hid from you the messages of her soul. Obscure and grave she stood before Beatrice with unsmiling lips: but very slowly she stretched out her hands, hands that sculptors had modelled and poets praised and lovers kissed; such frail hands! But they drew Beatrice nearer; nearer, she felt, than she had ever been drawn towards any creature before; they hovered over her like birds on doubtful wings; they did not touch her, but they seemed to greet and protect her. in one swift gesture.

'I thank you that you came to see me,' Hyacinthe de Penthès said; and when Beatrice heard her voice, her heart sprang against her side. Life had not changed that haunting voice, the years had not dulled the magic which made her tone hold words as if it created them out of the

living air.

'At first,' Hyacinthe continued, 'I thought the roses came from curiosity — of such gifts one has had — so many! But the second week surprised me. I thought: "This curiosity must be deep!" I asked about you. I heard you were alone, that you were very discreet, that you knew no one; and the third week I said to myself: "No, no! this has lasted too long; it is a kindness; and

when one can no longer give, kindness is precious to one!"

She drew Beatrice down beside her, and for a long time they were silent. In the silence their shy and inaccessible souls approached each other warily. Beatrice recognised in this woman before her not only an artist, but a being as strangely, passionately proud as she was herself. A fastidious and lonely creature, honest and defenceless in a world whose stoutest armour is its falsity. Her pride flickered, and her reticence became suddenly a trivial thing. She threw it away, and spoke as she had never dreamed of speaking to any living soul.

'I have had nothing in my life at all,' she said abruptly. 'I think I must tell you how empty it has been, because otherwise you will not perhaps understand what I have come to say to you. I have had neither a lover nor a child; and I have done nothing. I have expressed myself no more than this brick under my feet — less, for that at least is solid and has colour. I speak to you now because I must; but I am by nature uncontrollably dumb; and I have never in my life been — for one moment — free!'

The hands of Madame de Penthès moved in her lap; they opened, spread themselves wide as if to show their

emptiness, and closed again.

'I too have nothing,' she breathed gently. 'I once had everything, I was the richest woman in the world — and in a moment a beggar! If one has nothing, one is robbed simply of life — but life does not despise one; human beings, when they have robbed you of all that you possess, despise you.'

'I have despised myself,' said Beatrice. 'Can you not see how one despises oneself? When one has never been anything, never done anything, never possessed anything? Do you think being despised by people matters? After one has despised oneself, I do not think anything

matters.'

The swift hands lifted themselves high in the air, they expressed scorn, laughter, the escape of all gay and savage

souls from the dull tyranny of the herd.

'Never! Never!' cried Hyacinthe de Penthès. 'Never have people mattered to me! But a person, alas! always some person, some beloved! Ah! how they matter! How they tear all one's heart out, how they drink one's blood, and wither all the leaves of life! That you do not know!—and you call yourself unhappy?'

'No,' said Beatrice humbly; 'I suppose I always knew I could not bear it, and so I was afraid to try. Men made me very angry if I thought that they could touch me.

I preferred to suffer alone.'

'Ah! and perhaps you were right!' Hyacinthe replied with a long shudder. 'That suffering through the being and the actions of another is a rebellion in the blood. It kills — and you do not die! You see yourself a murderer — for to what you gave life must you not also, if it no longer loves you, have given death? And yet, although through your hands came the death of love, the love you bear in yourself will not die. It gives when there is no longer anyone to take. It kills when there is no longer any life left in you to die.'

Beatrice's head bowed lower; she spoke hardly above a whisper: 'What has once lived can afford to die. But to keep — to keep too long, till there is no way left of giving, no one who can ever want you at any time, no strength in yourself to produce anything — ah, Madame! to be useless — to have been always useless — isn't that to be

born dead?'

She had said this; she, Beatrice, had actually said it! Her bared heart felt incredulous, but free. She knew that she was safe, the pity in the eyes confronting her was too profound, too impersonal, to hurt her passionate pride.

Hyacinthe laid one hand lightly on her knee.

'And you came here,' she asked, 'to say this to me?

Because you thought I should understand? But why?' 'I should not have troubled you with so little a thing,' Beatrice explained, 'if it was only for the relief of speaking to you—although it has been a relief. I came to ask you to take enough money to free yourself from your present difficulties, and to act again. I know you are ill, but I have heard you speak. All the years since I last saw you in London, I have been waiting for you. You do not know what you can give! Don't you see - you express everything! Everything that any of us has ever felt. You lift your hand and my whole heart is eased. I look in your eyes, and there is nothing that they do not tell me. All I ask you is, that you let me make it possible for you to come back! I have told you - what I have told you - so that you may see what right I have to ask it: and what it will mean to me if you consent to do it. You are not cruel. If you saw me as I am - a little empty cup, held out for you to fill - you would not refuse to

Madame de Penthès put her hand over her eyes. Silence filled the little room again, soft as darkness; through the shutters a single ray of light rested on the

fill it. You know that you have an infinite store!'

floor like a small gold leaf.

'But you ask so much!' Hyacinthe said at last in a low voice. 'You ask me to take up my life again — and I had laid it down. What you offer me is much, too — but, ah! my friend, what you ask, is it not more?'

, 'I think,' said Beatrice quietly, 'that one could never

ask too much of you.'

'An hour ago,' Hyacinthe said after a long pause, 'I should have said "impossible" — with all the weight of all these heavy years, impossible! — with the nearness of death, the only one of all my friends who has not forgotten me, impossible! But I cannot say that now. I cannot say impossible. You have done something to me — I don't know what — you have stirred an old fire; and

you yourself touch me. I see that you are a real person. I am tempted to do what you ask simply because you ask it. But I must warn you first not to act from mere enthusiasm or from a mistaken kindness. Look in my face. I am ill, I am very tired; and I am old. We are not children to be impulsive, you and I, and we are too wise to be only kind to each other. Look in my face and tell me, can I hold the world as I used to hold it?'

Beatrice leaned forward; the fathomless eyes shone at her under a wreath of soft grey hair, the subtle lips smiled faintly, the white shadowed face, clear as an etching, sharpened by the sculptor Life, seemed carved upon the air, imperishably carved.

'Ah!' said Beatrice with a long low sigh, 'you can

hold anything!'

Hyacinthe de Penthès laughed, a low, amused, slightly mocking laugh. She was not mocking Beatrice, nor her-

self. She was mocking life.

'Well, well!' she said. 'And it is said you English people are practical! We will see if my rags and tatters will imitate successfully that fine garment of my youth! I am in your hands; let us set out together like two old beggars climbing to a shrine. They believe that at the mountain-top there will be a miracle; and if they get there, is that not miracle enough?'

PART II

The hour for which they had laboured had come. The largest theatre in New York was packed from floor to ceiling.

Beatrice sat alone in the stalls. She had forgotten all she had done to make this moment possible. It was less than nothing to her that she had turned her stately privacies into the life of a travelling gipsy, nor that she, who had known only the discriminating refinements of domestically minded invalids, had companionated with success the most impassioned spirit of her age. All her work seemed of no avail; it could not help Hyacinthe now, that Beatrice had been a business manager, a nurse, a friend, a special Providence, an errand boy, a just judge, a conciliating influence, a financier and a rock of defence; nothing could help Hyacinthe now. She was alone with her genius.

Beatrice's heart fluttered like a bird's between her breast and her throat; her mind, tortured with fear, felt sick and blind. Had she betrayed Hyacinthe and given her darling to the lions? Where was the force in that fatigued old woman to hold this vast crowd? Did they want, even if Hyacinthe could give it, an expression of

perfect art?

Ominously the lights sank and the curtain slowly lifted. The scene began with two of Madame's company, both competent actors of whom one need expect neither

more nor less than their competence.

Very softly, almost unnoticed, the thin arrowy figure of Hyacinthe de Penthès stole in from the wings. Hyacinthe lifted her hand between her face and the biggest audience in the world, and was completely silent.

'Now I know what death is!' Beatrice thought, 'and instead of feeling nothing and being stopped, you feel

everything and go on for ever!'

But Hyacinthe dropped her hand, and her voice floated over the vast theatre like bells across water, like the scent of pines across an Alpine meadow. No whisper of it was lost, no lovely light inflection failed to reach its

goal.

Breath moved again between Beatrice's stiffened lips; she could think at last as well as see. She was not afraid of Hyacinthe's conception of the part. Once you had seen Hyacinthe act, any other conception of the same part was impossible; you might as well think of taking a

bird away from its wings. Age had not affected this intensity of fusion. What Hyacinthe acted, she was; but it had deepened her beauty. She had always possessed a loveliness that dwelt behind the senses. Time had quickened rather than altered this beauty. The years had sharpened her perfect senses until they had become exquisite mediums of spirit. She, who had once expressed all the passions of the human heart, now gave as well, with a subtler penetration, the experiences of the human soul. There was no end to the art of Hyacinthe de Penthès; it had become infinite.

So much Beatrice grasped, but if she were satisfied, what would this audience feel? These people with their diamonds and their ignorance, so hygienic, so insensitive, blunted and crushed under the weight of their possessions — how could they be moved by a being to whom nothing in life mattered but the integrity of her art? Were they moved or were they only curious?

At the first sound of Hyacinthe's voice, the vague murmur of the great audience ceased; the theatre was as silent

as the Day of Judgment.

Hyacinthe sat talking quietly at a table with an old family friend. What did they think of this old woman with her white sculptured face, and her serene and peaceful ways? She rose, and walked to the window; her shawl hung from her fingers like the romantic years of her life—at one moment an experience sharpened into a weapon, at another a mere evasive hint of one of the deepest secrets of the soul. She moved across the stage like milk, there was no stiffness in her, no hint of the heavy years. You knew, you had always known from the tender, half-ironic smile of her greeting, that she had loved this old friend of the house—loved and found him wanting—and still loved. What she was telling him now was what he ought always to have known; and she knew, even while she was so gently telling him, without scorn, that he

would never understand. The burden of all the past, the burden of all the future, lay on those light shoulders alone.

Beatrice felt that the audience had slowly begun to know what this quiet woman meant. From her first ironic smile to her last terrible cry, they would be with her now. What she whispered to them, they must hear; what she suffered, they would feel; what she knew, they could not know, but they would watch, absorbed, the pageant of her knowledge spread out before them, 'Occult, withheld, untrod.' They did not even know the words of the language that she spoke in, but of the language of her soul they recognised each echo. Genius had done what genius alone can do; it had created the medium as well as the message.

Beatrice gave a long low sigh of relief. The pearl of great price, for which she had sold all that she possessed, was not to be thrown under the feet of swine. But the last, most urgent of her fears could not be stilled; had Hyacinthe the physical strength to face the fearful havor

of emotion which must break into the part?

Again and again the curtain rose on the lithe, erect figure; again and again, with an immense — was it an ironic — humility, Hyacinthe de Penthès bowed her thanks, her dignity, her response to the enraptured audience. Only Beatrice knew what all this heated clamour meant to the delicate being who accepted it as if it were a pleasure. She alone knew that the interruption of applause beat upon her strength, pulled down the splendid vision she had built around her, and was like a physical torture to her bared nerves.

Beatrice did not move; not once did she go behind the scenes, or associate herself in any outward way with what was taking place before her. She sat erect and impassive, her eyes fixed upon the lowered curtain, or upon the figure of Hyacinthe, with the same controlled, indifferent

glance. But out of her heart the words rose before they fell from Hyacinthe's lips; each gesture of the swift, gracious figure flickered before Beatrice's mind, before it reached her eyes. Her work was over; but her deep participation was not over.

She lived too intensely not to know that she was giving Hyacinthe life. She stiffened, as in the great third act all the pent-up horror, all the concealed and quiet tragedy, burned alive and fierce upon the stage. Could the frail figure bear being beaten to pieces by passion? No! she could not bear it — but she could take passion, enlarge it, and throw it forth, transfigured, until every heart knew not only what it could bear, but what it had never dreamed that it could bear. She could give them the whole of motherhood in a cry; the whole of defeat in a mere gesture of an empty hand; and so tremendous was the force of the last agony that, as the curtain fell, you knew defeat was beauty.

Hours passed while Beatrice waited for the storm of sound to cease. 'They'll kill her! They'll kill her!' she said to herself; but she said it without bitterness, for what was death in the midst of such a triumph? She herself had died a thousand deaths and did not care.

She tried to hide her pride when the call-boy fetched her, and she followed him, remote and austere, through crowded, cheering passages.

Hyacinthe was lying on a couch, wrapped from head to foot in a thick white shawl. She was still surrounded by half a dozen vociferous, acclaiming people; but she did not notice them.

When she saw Beatrice, she swept them away from her. She seemed to sweep them out of the world, so wide and final was her gesture, so completely did she leave herself and Beatrice alone face to face.

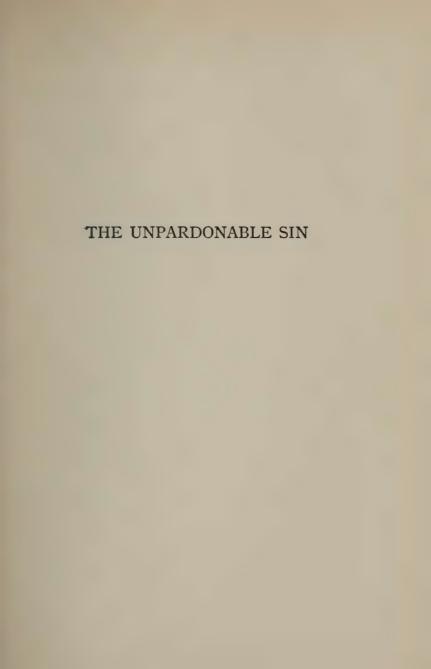
'Well,' she whispered, 'it is what you wanted? We have got there?'

'I am satisfied,' said Beatrice.

Hyacinthe's dark wild eyes sank into Beatrice, nothing checked them, not her pride, nor her loneliness; they took

possession of Beatrice's soul.

'It is well,' said Hyacinthe softly. 'I too am satisfied. The two old beggar women have climbed their mountain! It was a long way up for our stiff bones, but we have reached the shrine. They make a great noise out there, and the gentlemen you see in here have been talking of a great deal of gold. But at my age it is not the gold nor the noise that are the miracle. No, my dear little one, it is that we have climbed the height together — it is that we are there!'







THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

WHEN I am told by advanced psychologists that action deepens the heinousness of sin, I am impressed, of course, but I retain my private heresy that there are certain cases when action in itself purifies.

It lets out the poison. Not that I am defending bad action — there is nothing morally beneficent in poison, out or in. I can only say that I believe there is one thing worse than mortal sin, and that is the presence of a sin

which the consenting will doesn't carry out.

My story is about four 'good' people, of the kind you can meet any day in your own homes. We will call them Colonel and Mrs. Cotterill, and Major and Mrs. Hamilton. They weren't any of them really young. Nina Cotterill was my god-child. She was the type of woman men call 'a dear little thing.' She was eighteen when she married Colonel Cotterill, and he was a battered forty.

The Cotterills had three charming children and were, I believe, excellent and devoted parents. Nina wasn't pretty, a little thin stick of a figure, too large a nose, and a bad complexion; but it didn't matter. She had a pair of large dark eyes with long black lashes, and the rest she

did for herself.

I expect she was vicious when she was six years old;

but she was, of course, perfectly respectable.

Colonel Cotterill was a stout, honest, strong-minded person, spiritually timid. He was perfectly satisfied with himself and as much of the world as he proposed to admit. He was kind-hearted and as fair as any man can be without imagination.

He thought he was master in his own house, and he wouldn't have bullied anyone if he could have got them to do what he wanted without bullying. He had what is

called the military mind.

The Cotterills had plenty of money and gave nice little dinners in Montpelier Square.

My friendship with the Hamiltons was more authentic. Maurice was the son of one of my best friends. I had known him since he was a baby, one of those babies with large mouths and a fine head of hair who look attractive and scream very easily. The Hamiltons were well off and put him into the Army. I saw him every now and then, but I remember being rather surprised when his mother told me he had always been devoted to me, and would I be very nice to his new American wife and take her about a little in London? I said I would do what I could for her, but that I was rather afraid of American women, I found them so exceedingly bright.

'Oh, Pauline isn't bright,' Mrs. Hamilton said reassuringly. 'You needn't be afraid of that, she's as quiet as if

she was a pebble at the bottom of a pond.'

Maurice brought her to see me six weeks after their honeymoon. I have seldom been more favourably impressed by any young woman. Pauline was tall and slender, with an immense quantity of smooth golden hair, really gold, like Browning's young lady of Pornic. I suppose she looked like a lily. She had a long, white face, with eyes set wide apart, grey and speculative, under firm, golden eyebrows.

She hardly opened her mouth, but after the first half-hour, I knew I could have lived with her all my life. Pauline had the two best qualities a woman can have—patience and generosity. Unfortunately these two virtues

seldom pay for their keep.

She moved about in a mist of happiness, as intangible and exquisite as the promise of green that clouds the young spring trees. Her atmosphere persuaded you of joy.

She was beautifully dressed, and clever enough to think everything Maurice Hamilton said wonderful.

They had in the course of time, two very nice children. Pauline brought them up admirably. She chose her nurses carefully, and never let anything interfere with Maurice.

I don't think he was exactly in love with her after the first few months of marriage, but he wasn't out of it. She was still a pleasurable habit.

Pauline was a woman of infinite restraint and delicacy, but she couldn't help loving him to distraction. Her love didn't inconvenience Maurice in the least, and I don't think it would ever have inconvenienced him if it hadn't been for the war. The war has made a good many notable changes on a large scale, but, good Heavens, if one could see the silent changes it has made on smaller scales! A giant oak when it falls makes a gap in the land-scape; but one forgets the thousands of unseated ants!

Maurice went out to France immediately. He had influence, and, in spite of being recklessly extravagant, he was known to have a very fine estate. It needed looking after and he hadn't looked after it. He left it now to Pauline. They gave him an excellent staff job.

Pauline became a V.A.D. and saved unflinchingly in every direction except that of her personal strength. I suppose Maurice was glad when he got back to find twenty thousand pounds waiting for him, and the estate cleared; but I doubt if he quite liked Pauline to be responsible for having saved it.

She had suffered horribly because she didn't know that on the sliding scale of safety which moved in those days between the intense and hourly danger of the trenches and occasional air raids, Maurice was relatively secure. I dare say Maurice was useful. I believe the authorities rewarded his services with a D.S.O. I am sure he was not at all beneath the average of courage, but he had never learned to say no to anything he wanted, and comfort stood high on the list.

Pauline never came back to the hospital from an infrequent outing, without expecting to find a telegram to say that Maurice was killed. You could see that telegram written on her face for nearly five years. She didn't look quite so much like a lily at the end of it.

The Cotterills were involved as well. Colonel Cotterill was over age and went out to Gallipoli and fought hard. Nina made the leaves of various young officers extraordinarily difficult. She said she was dreadfully sorry for

'the poor dear boys.'

She was prepared, so she told me, to 'do her bit' (I often wondered if that dreadful phrase sprang originally from Nina's lips) even, I imagine, to the extent of losing Colonel Cotterill, but this demand upon her fortitude was never exacted from her. Colonel Cotterill returned from his campaigns with a heightened complexion, a diseased liver, and no memory at all of all the dead boys he had shepherded to their deaths. I don't think the Government gave him any honours, but I was told that in his bulletheaded way he had been quite extraordinarily brave.

Pauline lunched with me on the day of the Armistice. She looked as I think she must have looked on her marriage day, stirred to the depths of her being by inarticulate

joy.

'It's too good to be true,' she whispered, 'too good to be true — oh, all those poor women who have lost their men!' And then she cried, wrung by pity, for nearly half an hour, while I stroked her thick gold hair; I noticed that the roots were turning grey. I don't think Pauline was very easily sympathetic, she was not sufficiently imaginative, but after five years' suspense she had quite a clear conception of what a broken heart would be like.

She cheered up after lunch, and then Nina came in. It was their first meeting. Nina was dressed in black taffeta silk, with an ermine cap and a short ermine cloak. Diamonds flashed in her ears, and she had the smile

and the teeth which adorn advertisements for dental powders.

She proceeded to make herself extremely charming. The only thing that Nina ever noticed about other women was the way they were dressed, and I think she was conscious that Pauline's clothes were distinguished.

Nina formed a dozen ties between them in half an hour (the safety of adored husbands was the principal one). She reminded me of a young and spirited blackbird making light-hearted attacks upon forbidden cherries.

Nina was determined to get at Pauline, partly because I think she had taken a genuine fancy to Pauline's Russian sables, and partly because she was annoyed with me for never having introduced her before.

Pauline was in one of those dangerous states of elation only known to very self-restrained people when they control themselves outwardly and inwardly make remarkably silly mistakes. They left the house together, very nearly arm in arm.

Six months later, while Nina was paying me a polite call (she comes in every now and then on the off-chance that I may take a fancy to her and leave her some of my rather good old lace) Pauline and Maurice were announced.

I am not a person of any great prescience, but I confess I felt a qualm of anxiety. Pauline and Maurice had been abroad together since he retired from the army so that Maurice had never met the Cotterills, though I understood that the women had exchanged enthusiastic telephone calls.

The whole thing happened as quickly as the flick of a duster against priceless china.

Nina embraced her friend and held out her tiny, greedy hand — or both of them (for from the first she hid danger under the security of gush) to the unfortunately exposed Maurice.

It must always be urged in defence of Maurice (and I want to be quite fair to him) that he had been badly bored for several years, and then returned to find Pauline broken down physically, and looking twice her age. As he met Nina's melting, inciting eyes, his whole expression altered, he became as vividly alert as a fox terrier presented with a bone. It was a most curiously quick and elemental business.

Pauline and I were huddled together as if a wind had blown us out of their way. Maurice and Nina sat side by side on the sofa, exchanging, no doubt, the most harmless remarks, and every second of the time Nina was putting forth that extraordinary and remorseless power which Nature so oddly concentrates upon the least conscientious of women. They were there a long time, and Nina never let him alone for a moment. She never took that power off him, even when she rolled her thrilling eyes upon us, and tried to caress us into acquiescence.

Pauline wore a puzzled look. She wasn't in the least alarmed, poor dear, but she evidently felt that something or other was up. I think civilisation has removed the highest type of American woman a little too far away

from instinct.

Pauline could only appeal to the best in Maurice, and that is why she lost him.

When Pauline rose to go, Maurice paid not the least attention, he simply didn't see what she was doing.

Pauline stood in front of me, very tall and patient, not in the least annoyed; but she was after a minute or two

surprised.

It was a breach of manners to which she wasn't accustomed. Maurice's manners in public were as faultless as Eton could make them, and no woman likes to stand and wait for another woman to let her husband go. At last Pauline said 'Maurice!' good-humouredly, with a tolerant little smile for his immersion. But he didn't hear. He

would not, I think, have heard a gun go off behind him, unless Nina had let him.

It was Nina who rose precipitately at the sound of her friend's voice, and Maurice rose with her, his poor, silly eyes fixed on her face; and still Pauline wasn't alarmed. I heard them making engagements to meet.

I went away for the summer, but on my return I was

told enough to make me thoroughly uneasy.

The Cotterills and the Hamiltons had become inseparable. They had spent their holidays together in the country, and now that they had returned to Town, they met every day.

Their intimacy assumed a proportion which was unknown in a set that had mild appreciations, and enough

of everything.

Pauline didn't come near me, which was in itself ominous, and I faced the fact that in dining with the Cotterills, which I did as a rule once a year, I should probably have to learn a garbled version of what had happened, from the person who had caused it.

Nina embraced me with more than her usual display of warmth. She even presented me with a bunch of Parma violets, and pinned them efficiently on my old black velvet gown. I nearly asked her if she had bought them as a sin offering, for she was known to be frugal in her generosities.

'You'll see your two dears,' she informed me tenderly, 'Maurice and Pauline. I love knowing your friends.'

Nina wore a flame-coloured dress embroidered with golden birds. It was very short, skimpy, and with nothing to speak of above the waist. I know it was the fashion. Her hair was curled, and her lips a mere slash of unnatural red.

Pauline came in soon after. At least, I knew it must be Pauline. She looked ten years older, but if she had got ten years older, she would not have necessarily turned so terribly stiff. I thought the whole evening that she hardly

seemed alive. She spoke slowly and cautiously as if each sentence was a doubtful experiment. Her whole strength was absorbed in being there at all.

It was the most painful affair I ever witnessed.

The exhibition between Maurice and Nina was, not to

put too fine a point upon it, indecent.

His passion was as flagrant as a red flag. He took no pains whatever to hide it. He followed Nina about like a dog. When she spoke, he jumped, and when anyone else addressed him, he answered like a person jerked out of a trance.

When Colonel Cotterill interrupted his wife's singing, I

thought Maurice was going to knock him down.

Nina exulted in his infatuation. She sang at him, caressed us each in turn at him, and whenever it was possible (in my time, of course, it wouldn't have been possible), she seized him and pulled him about, leaned against his shoulder, or caught his hand to cross the room, with an exaggerated air of being a baby of five.

Whenever these demonstrations occurred, Pauline sat with her eyes held away, like someone tied to a stake, compelled to see her beloved tortured. The situation was very near breaking point. Once in the course of the evening, between her cruel sentimental ditties, Nina gave Maurice her hands to warm (she said they had got so cold playing the piano), and Pauline said suddenly, without smiling: 'Nina, is that quite fair?'

Colonel Cotterill, who had been seriously pleased over a perfectly cooked dinner, seemed to see nothing peculiar in the atmosphere, but he was not a perceptive person. I

doubted if he had thought Gallipoli dangerous.

He sang some excellent comic songs, quite to my surprise, for I hadn't known he possessed this rude intellectual gift. It must have endeared him to his mess. We played bridge after the music, Pauline and Colonel Cotterill against a General Andrews and myself.

Maurice and Nina sat in the other part of the room, half

hidden by a curtain.

Pauline deliberately chose a seat with her back to them. She played a masterly game of bridge, steady, accurate, and infinitely considerate to her partner, but when I looked at her face, out of which had gone all expression but that one awful expression of guarded self-control, my heart was literally in my boots.

She had the look of a person who has reached the end

of her tether, and believes that she can still go on.

Maurice must have been terrible at home. His nerves were worn to fiddlestrings — if a teaspoon clattered, he jumped half a yard. Some women can be worse than shell-shock to a man. They can keep him under fire without intermission until his last reserve of manhood has

gone.

And Nina was perfectly safe. From beginning to end there was no question of that — there they were, she and her fat Colonel, in their big modern house, with eccentric modern furniture, highly coloured and shaped, solidly entrenched behind material sanctities. Can't you see them with their bank and their church, their expensive schools for their healthy, hygienic children, and all the time beneath the ordered surface of their lives, making (and laughing at) the hell they had made for those two poor friends of theirs? For Colonel Cotterill knew a flirtation was on — he wasn't as dense as all that; he kept his eye cocked on Nina, his hard, blue, truculent eye. Once or twice in the course of the evening he chuckled to himself, as if Nina's joke was as good as one of their cook's dishes.

He knew Nina wouldn't go too far - he would have

turned her out of the house if she had.

I didn't wait for Pauline to come and see me; I went to

see her the next day.

She looked very vague at first, as if she didn't know who I was. But I made short work of her reserves. You can't respect people's reticences when they're sliding over a precipice.

I said: 'My dear child, tell me, what are you going to do

about it?'

She winced as if I had hit her.

'You mustn't mind me,' I said. 'I'm an old woman who loves you, and once, long ago, my head was in the dust.'

You see, she was very proud; she wouldn't have let anyone stoop to her; but when I said that, she gave a queer little sigh, like the sudden failure of a person trying not to faint.

For a long time neither of us said anything, and then she began defensively. She said that I mustn't misunderstand. Nothing had happened. Nobody (she was almost fierce over that) — nobody was to blame.

Maurice was younger than she was, and he had had a very bad time in France. She couldn't divert him; she wasn't, she said, naturally amusing. Nina was a magical creature, so simple and innocent, like a little girl — one couldn't possibly scold her. Yes, she had spoken to her; I mustn't think she was proud — she had thought it was only fair to Maurice and to Nina herself; but Nina had laughed and hugged her. She didn't mean the slightest harm. Had I ever seen Peter Pan? Well, Nina was rather like that - half fairy and half child. I had a shorter. more comprehensive title for Nina on my lips, but I kept them shut. And then Pauline said a little haltingly: 'After all, you see, I'm American. I love England very much. but just lately I've felt that it's a foreign country. I don't think things mean the same over here.' I refrained from saving that bad women and spoilt men mean the same anywhere. After all, I saw what the poor child meant. In that marvellous country of hers, people do more or less know their places. They run in sets. If they are respectable, they are noticeably respectable. They don't wear

blue woad and talk like savages, and yet keep out of the divorce courts.

'You say things,' Pauline murmured — 'oh, not you, of course ——'

'Yes, I do,' I interrupted firmly. 'I say shocking things, but they're only shocking because they're true. I don't say them when they aren't.'

'Well,' said Pauline, with another curious little sigh, 'I don't suppose before this I ever thought such things could

be true.

'Ah,' I admitted, 'you've got to face facts. This is an ugly business, my dear. Can't you get him away from her? After all, you're not tied to a raft in mid-ocean. Have you spoken to Maurice?'

'I can't,' said Pauline, 'I can't. I can do anything else,

but I can't speak to Maurice.'

And she said she wasn't proud! Well, if she'd sobbed at his feet, I don't believe he'd have taken his sleep-walking eyes off the image of that little dressed-up doll, who pulled him about as if he were on a string.

'I have suggested going away,' Pauline added after a pause, 'and he says if I need a change there's no reason

why I shouldn't.'

'He won't go with you?' I asked.

Pauline shook her head, but she made it gentler.

'He can't,' she said.

'My dear,' I suggested at last, 'don't you think perhaps Colonel Cotterill ought to be spoken to? He's extraordinarily stupid, of course, but he's quite kind and honest.'

She looked at me for a moment, as if she had come on

something she couldn't bear.

'I spoke to him myself,' she said very slowly; 'it was dreadful to have to speak to him, but I wanted too much to save Maurice; and he said "Come now, Polly, you're too good-looking to be jealous; why don't you run someone yourself? Try me, for instance." I think he thinks it's

some kind of game. You see I don't understand English people. I have often thought of going away; but if I did that it might make it harder for Maurice. I know it seems curious, but he likes to have me to talk to, and then I should be afraid that if I were not there, people might say

things about Nina.'

'You needn't bother your head about Nina,' I said with the brutality of my race; 'she likes being talked about, as long as her husband will let her be; but of course there's something in what you say about Maurice. It'll give him a freer hand. Still, I think you'd better go away. People's talking is the only way of getting hold of Colonel Cotterill. I can go to him myself then. You don't happen to remember, but I have the privilege of having represented Nina at the Font. It'll make a possible excuse for me to intervene.'

Pauline shook her head. She didn't want anyone to intervene. She said she could go on quite well as they were. Maurice liked her being there, she wasn't in his

way, and he liked to talk to her about Nina.

The perfection of manner is sometimes the perfection of policy. I don't think I know another woman who could so resolutely have kept her hands off her husband. Pauline did it entirely to spare him, and if anything could have spared him, it would have been the blessed immunity she gave him.

He poured out to her (it seems incredible, but I have her word for it) all Nina's admissions and refusals — the things she thought they might do, and where she drew the line. The generosity of that margin rather astonished

Pauline.

Pauline must have been very gentle to him, but I doubt if in the end she still believed Nina to be like Peter Pan.

She got to look so thin that I constantly wondered why she didn't fall out of her lovely clothes.

I don't know what brought things to a head, for after

that one hour's talk, Pauline never opened her mouth to me again. She froze, I think, beyond the altitude of speech. But one day I heard she had gone to America alone.

She hadn't said or written a word to make me think she had gone in agreement with my suggestion. I dare say she had forgotten all about my having made it. She had only reached that moment when, like Hagar waterless in the desert, she could no longer bear to watch the death of her child.

I heard afterwards that before she went she had shocked Nina very much by urging her to yield to Maurice. Pauline, with her rigid Puritan conscience, must have travelled very far before she reached such a point.

Maurice went on the same as usual. He shopped with Nina in the mornings, and went to tea with her in the afternoons, and Colonel Cotterill was his genial host, four evenings out of the seven.

I decided to make my opportunity. I wrote and asked Colonel Cotterill to call upon me on business, and without his wife. Since my husband's death he had often been very helpful to me about investments.

He came promptly and drank my tea with the affability of one who is met by his accustomed blend. He told me that he had learned how to make tea in a samovar, and it appeared to be the only incident he had remembered from an adventurous campaign in Russia.

When I said: 'Colonel Cotterill, I want to talk to you about Nina,' he said: 'D'you think she's a bit off colour, what?'

I told him what I did think, and I added that my son had heard talk about her at his club.

This convinced him. His prominent blue eyes advanced a little farther out of his head. 'That won't do,' he said reflectively, 'that won't do at all. Tiresome of the feller's wife to go to America.'

I ventured to ask him what steps he intended to take, and he replied with a complete absence of hostility: 'Oh, kick the feller out of the house, of course. Stick of a woman, that Pauline! Why couldn't she hold on to him?'

I don't know how I managed to get into Colonel Cotterill's head that a dictated letter was preferable to a kick, but in the end he thought he had chosen this idea out of his own intellectual resources, and was rather pleased with it.

'Nina's a naughty little thing,' he told me with a

chuckle, 'but her heart's in the right place.'

I don't know what he made Nina say or what threats

he used to enforce her saying it.

I dare say there was no need of threats. She had only to look about her, at her charming house full of the things she liked, and her children's photographs prominent on all the mantelpieces. No doubt her heart was, as Colonel Cotterill had stated, in the right place. She must have missed Maurice, but there were other things she would have missed more. The right thing was no doubt done in quite the right way.

But the sequel of this highly moral story isn't at all re-

assuring.

Major Hamilton received his letter of dismissal. Pauline had this tribute, poor woman, to look back on. He cabled to her, 'The situation is at an end. Will you come back to me?'

She came at once and took him to Monte Carlo. I don't know what efforts he made to stand his dismissal, but

they weren't enough.

He shot himself rather tactfully in the garden after losing at the tables a small sum which he could well afford. And Pauline went very slowly and quietly out of her mind. She never attempted to do the slightest harm to anyone, not even to herself. She sat staring straight in front of her all day long, and when anybody spoke to her, she would say reassuringly: 'You see, the situation is now at an end.'

A DANGEROUS CHARACTER





A DANGEROUS CHARACTER

PART I

HERMANN BRAUN was an insignificant-looking little man. He had pale flaxen hair, through which his round head flushed pink; mild blue eyes like cornflowers, and pimples. Nobody ever noticed him in a tram or remembered him if they met him at a party.

When he was twenty-four he was startled into marriage by a big raw-boned girl with a loud voice. She hadn't a perception except at the moment when she met Herr Braun, and, feeling that she ought to get married, settled

that he would do.

Herr Hermann Braun earned a small, comfortable income, and they took a stuffy, eyeless flat in a street as narrow and dark as a black shoelace. In the winter the wind whistled through it as if it were a pipe, and in the summer no breath of air ever penetrated below the high-peaked roof.

Hermann went to his office every day at nine o'clock and returned to a hot, querulous, steaming meal at one. Then he plunged back into the shelter of his office again till five, and after that he had the cafés, a little music, a glass of beer or two, and once a week, when there were

cheap tickets, the opera.

On Sundays he strapped a knapsack on his back, pulled on heavy woollen stockings which overlapped his hobnailed boots, and trudged into the Wiener Wald. On his way there he sang; he had a light tenor voice, and sang in time and tune (as all his friends did), and when his three flaxen-haired children were old enough, they trudged after him and sang too.

Hermann loved his children; he would have liked to bring them up in a modern indulgent manner without the menace of authority; but his wife screamed this theory away. She forced the children to obey their father after they had obeyed her. The children, submitting to the violence of habit, obeyed Hermann lethargically, but without the stimulus of fear. His wife firmly believed that she obeyed him too; at any rate, she took care of his interests, mended his clothes, and added to his income by refusing to allow him to entertain his friends. It was a narrow outer life and gave no indication of Hermann's splendid dreams.

His dreams were his own business. Even during his compulsory courtship, though he had shared melons, and once a cigarette, with his beloved, he had never attempted

to share his dreams.

Hermann came from a family of faithful Socialists. They had all been like himself, well-to-do middle-class business men, or clerks in Government offices, and most of them had had to be rather careful that their Socialism didn't leak out. Hermann was careful too: he talked of his theories only to a few chosen comrades, under the trees in the Wiener Wald, or behind pillars in cafés. But whatever hour of the day or night you had peeped into Hermann's brain, you would have discovered a Socialistic Republic functioning at high speed. His republic was full of miraculous civic improvements, the freedom of men, the freedom of children, the careful fostering and subsidising of science, the collection of a revenue solely for the purposes of education and hygiene, and the final abolition of war. Whatever else there was in Hermann's republic. there was never the slightest trace of a uniform. Everybody was to have enough to eat, enough work to do. enough to think about, and splendid intervals of enjoyment. A perpetual concert was to be given in the Hofburg. Lots of little men, like Hermann, but with more bounce, were to regulate everything. And curiously enough all of them had light tenor voices.

Just at the moment when in his dreams the faint strains of Schubert were wafted on the air, Hermann would be startled by the harsh crash of a trumpet, scarlet outriders would flash by, he would catch sight of a heavy, crafty old face — a face with arrogant chiselled eyelids, slightly twinkling pigs' eyes, and a massive chin, and stopping abruptly (as everybody else did) Hermann would take his hat off and salute Kaiser Francis Joseph, who put all his dreams to rout. At such a moment nothing in the world seemed more solid than Francis Joseph—or more ephemeral than Hermann Braun's dreams.

The Kaiser was a merry, bigoted, bad old man with an excellent memory and very little understanding. There was a legend in Europe that he had a simple and abstemious character, and it is true that his wants were few, but it is a mistake to suppose that he had ever abstained from taking what he wanted. His eyes had a way of haunting Hermann for days after he had seen him, they were such inaccessible eyes, and so little likely to yield to any man's dreams.

It might be supposed that Hermann Braun watched the papers night and day to catch the moving spirit of events, but he did not do so. Events in the old empire moved as a rule without haste, and only a chance word at a café one June evening shook Hermann into attention. Someone had said that the Heir to the Throne had been assassinated in Sarajevo. Hermann shuddered. He did not like thrones, but he disliked bloodshed even more, and he knew that when the bloodshed happened to be royal, it seldom stopped at thrones.

'There will be a war, of course,' a stout man at the table next to him said in a hearty voice, and Hermann shud-

dered again.

Not even twenty years of Sunday, Wiener Schnitzel, and Crême Torte had degraded Hermann into heartiness about war.

With a sickened spirit he had to watch his light blind

city dancing to its doom.

Vienna wanted war, but not the kind of war she got. She wanted a small, satisfactory, punitive expedition against Serbia. She wished to wave a red flag in the face of the Russian Bull, but she didn't want the Bull to charge. She had often waved the red flag in its face before, and it had blinked its dull, slow eyes and looked the other way. This time Austria felt braver than ever, for not only did her powerful ally encourage her to wave the red flag, but Wilhelm himself obligingly offered to step in and tackle the Bull if by any chance it should lumber into the battle.

Austria disliked Prussia, but her admiration of Wilhelm was greater than her dislike.

There was no real choice before her. If she refused Wilhelm's suggestions, no amount of Ententes, distant and self-interested, could have come to her rescue before her military neighbour had swept her off the map.

Franz Joseph understood the situation thoroughly. He had always kept up his dignity with his young cousin, but he knew the price of it, and it seemed to him natural that his country should step in whenever necessary and pay it.

Franz Joseph disliked bloodshed nearly as much as Hermann Braun disliked it, but great Emperors digest bloodshed, even when they dislike it, more easily than

simple business men.

So the war began, and Hermann went to business as usual, and to the Wiener Wald on Sundays, singing his light tenor songs; but beneath his work and his singing, shadowing the beauty of every mountain flower, his heart ached and ached in a stubborn, dreadful way, as if it were being crushed between two stones.

Hermann was too old to fight; he was too old for it even to matter whether he was a pacifist or not. The question of going to prison for his dreams arose as little as the question of his going to fight for Franz Joseph's dignity.

He was perfectly remote from war, and his three little flaxen-headed children were too young. But there were other children not too young. Into this hateful cataclysm of war had been cast the youth of half the world.

Hermann thought of these things in his isolated position with a sharpness which might have been relieved by participation, but there was nothing personal to take his mind off the agony of the spectacle. Very few people are moved by the abstract, but the few who are moved by it are deeply moved.

Hermann had a docile mind, and for a while he bore his suffering without it occurring to him to rebel. Each time he saw the old Emperor driving through the streets, his heart sank lower, for the monarch's face was incapable of change; he was a comfortable old man, and the war made no real difference to him.

And then suddenly the one thing that could change Franz Joseph happened. Death stepped in and persuaded the last great Hapsburg to alter his immediate habits. The Emperor died, and with him died the static solidity of the Hapsburg Empire. Things could change now; the mould, which had looked as immutable as the hills, was broken. Hermann began to study the papers feverishly; he went secretly among his Socialist comrades and he was astonished to find that every day there were more Socialist comrades. Hermann discovered that he was one of a crowd: his thoughts no longer ached by themselves. Horrible stories from the Pinsk Marshes filtered in, and food was growing scarce. All the comrades said that Herr Blinder was the great obstacle to peace. He was a part of the old régime, and he lay across the lips of the people like a stone. It was he who would not let Parliament sit. and who worked behind his young monarch's back, to prolong the disastrous agony of war.

Hermann woke up one night with an extraordinary determination. He was for the first time in his life sure of himself. Of his ideas he had always been sure, but now he was sure that he was going to carry one of them out.

Tyrants are sometimes tyrants because they do not know the truth, because they have no perceptions, and do not study the feelings of their subordinates. Perhaps Hermann could show Herr Excellenz Blinder what these feelings were.

To remove tyranny, Hermann told himself reassuringly,

it is not always necessary to remove tyrants.

Hermann went about his purpose very quietly and met with many rebuffs. It was impossible to see Herr Excellenz Blinder. He'gave no appointments to unknown people. But Hermann nibbled his way through impossibilities. He bribed carefully in all directions, and at length the boring quality of a very determined will, against a series of bureaucratic inadvertencies, prevailed.

At half-past eleven one sultry August day, perspiring profusely, partly with terror and partly with heat, Hermann Braun was ushered into his Excellenz's large and sumptuous office. All the furniture looked very big and the walls were very far away.

Herr Excellenz Blinder had a small, compressed mouth set in a large, flat face; his eyes were prominent; they had no expression at all, but seemed to approach his interlocutor like the cold eyes of a codfish peering through a wave.

His voice had a Prussian rasp, and when he said, 'Herr Hermann Braun — well, what do you want?' Hermann knew that his task was hopeless. There was the same unshakeable selfishness, the same unchecked brutality in the man before him, as, Hermann had guessed, moved the mind (if it moved at all) of his old Emperor. But although the old Emperor was hard and had the falsity and

caprice of unfettered self-love, he also had human courtesy, and, if well handled, great good nature.

Herr Excellenz Blinder had neither of these qualities. He loved nothing but money, and the exercise of power

without personal risk.

When he repeated with impatience, 'What do you want?' Hermann took a step forward, bowed from his waist, and said in a voice out of which all emotion had been crushed.

'Your Excellenz, I came in hopes that you would listen to me. Parliament is about to open — it has been closed two years. It is said that you intend even now that it shall not remain open? Excellenz, Parliament is the voice of the people. We hope that you will permit it to remain open. We pray that you will allow our representatives to speak?'

'The voice of the people,' said Herr Blinder sneeringly, 'should remain silent in war-time. We do not wish information to be given to the enemy. The enemy should not

even know that the people have a voice.'

'Your Excellenz is aware,' pleaded Hermann, 'that the Parliament of England ——'

'England,' interrupted Herr Blinder, striking viciously on the table with his fist, 'is not to be mentioned here. How dare you drag in, even as a parallel, that hypocritical, infernal Island?'

'Only, Excellenz,' Hermann said humbly, 'to point out that her Parliament, which is always open, has not harmed her armies in the field.'

'What do you know about her armies in the field?' asked Herr Blinder wrathfully. 'She has no armies to speak of. France fights for her. As to her Parliament, it is what it always has been - a pack of ill-disciplined, ill-regulated hornets, bad friends, despicable enemies. England ---!' Herr Blinder made a gesture with his hand as if he would smash a vase which contained flowers on his desk, to typify the fate of England; but, remember-

ing that the vase was his own, he refrained.

'You shall soon see how long we shall keep open our Parliament,' he said with a flash of his big white teeth, which looked too large for his mouth. 'And now, Herr Hermann Braun, have the kindness to tell me who are these people (very unpatriotic and offensive people, I regret to think) for whom you seem the spokesman? I must have the names of your comrades drawn up on this paper before you leave me.'

'Excellenz, you are joking,' said Hermann firmly, 'I can

give you no such list.'

'I never joke with men like you,' said Herr Blinder contemptuously, 'I order. Here, write the names down!'

Hermann drew back.

'With your Excellenz,' he said quietly, 'I also do not joke. I shall never write any man's name there but my own.'

The two men looked at each other. Hermann was not afraid any more. With the complete failure of his hopes, his fears had also vanished.

He was once more alone with a new cold purpose. Herr Blinder looked at him with menacing fury, but the answering eyes which met his checked his threats. Herr Blinder did not know very much about human beings, but, like all shifty people, he understood when he came across something that will not shift.

'I could easily have you imprisoned,' he grumbled, 'but I have decided not to do so at present. I shall have you

watched instead, as a dangerous character.'

Hermann, who was five foot three, and had a bald forehead like a benevolent baby's, clicked his heels together and bowed once more with aristocratic thoroughness before he withdrew.

Time stood still; the war went on; Parliament reopened. It was the crowning moment of Herr Blinder's career.

After a long and fretful struggle he had overriden the will of his young and inexperienced Sovereign; he was going to open and at once dissolve (for the duration of the war) the Austrian Parliament.

Hermann read all about it in the papers, and, though he was not important enough even to know a member of Parliament, he contrived to obtain a ticket of admission.

'Perhaps,' he thought to himself wistfully, 'even at the last moment something will change him.'

The Viennese House of Parliament is a magnificent stone building decorated with flying statuary, opposite a cypress garden. Hermann gave the gardens a long look before he crossed the street. There was a fountain playing in them, and he kept (even in the running, pushing crowds) the music of it in his ears.

Everyone said afterwards that there was something half-hearted and jerky about the debate, as if unconsciously people were waiting for something more decisive than any man's words.

At last Herr Excellenz Blinder rose to his feet. He saw the way before him which would lead to most power, most money, most personal satisfaction, and he saw nothing else.

His speech was received in silence, a gloomy, heavy silence like the last tense moment before the breaking of a storm. A moment after he had finished, a shot rang out.

Herr Blinder's tall, rather bulky figure swayed as if it was surprised, and then lurched forward slowly across the desk before him. His arms moved once, as if his hands were trying to grasp a power they were accustomed to hold, but after that one useless attempt, he gave up trying to hold anything, and slipped a little untidily onto the floor.

A confused murmur of horror and excitement poured over the building. Herr Braun put down the revolver he had been using before anyone had time to snatch it away from him, and submitted without a protest to being pummelled and struck across the head, and called a variety of strikingly inappropriate names.

It seemed a long while before the police came, closed round him in an iron ring, and led him out into the sunshine. He was too small a man to see, over their heads, the fountain playing in the gardens.

PART II

Hermann spent several weeks in prison. It was a painful time, partly because he had never been alone before and did not know how to accustom himself to it, partly because all his dreams stopped at the moment when he heard the pistol go off, and watched Herr Excellenz Blinder responding with such astonishing meekness to his

gesture.

Instead of his dreams, he kept seeing his three children, fatherless, shrieked at without a break, perhaps defrauded of their Wiener Wald on Sundays, and his wife having to live, in grumbling insecurity, on his small insurances. She would take in lodgers, and, if they were not very careful, she would marry one of them. Later, if there should be more children, she would neglect Hermann's, and tell them that their father was nothing but a murderer. Hermann inconsistently flinched at this definition of himself, though he had not flinched before the fact. He felt no remorse; all his suffering (and he had a good deal of suffering) was because his act had such painful personal consequences.

He would have to be hanged, of course, and he knew he shouldn't like being hanged, and he hadn't saved enough money to set his mind at ease about his family. His parents were living and would feel the disgrace very much. They lived in Upper Austria and had a green and pleasant farm with a great many geese on it. Hermann saw very

little of them because they did not get on well with his wife. But he had been their child once, and he knew he wouldn't like one of his own small flaxen-haired brood to be hanged, however much in the dim future he might dislike his choice of a wife.

He thought the comrades would disapprove of him too; he had no idea (because he saw no one and had not dared to ask for a newspaper) that nobody in all Austria blamed him, and that to all his comrades and to unnumbered thousands on distant battlefields, he had become a sudden hero.

When his guards came into his cell and told him that he must get ready, he was to be taken to see the Kaiser, Hermann thought they were joking, and that this was the moment for him to prepare to be hanged. He shivered and felt sick, and longed to see some friendly face; but he never dreamed of not tidying himself neatly and going promptly and docilely with his gaolers.

When he saw that they were really taking him under the old green dome and between the lofty iron doors of the Hofburg, he was very much astonished, but he wasn't in the least relieved. It was as dreadful to think of seeing the Kaiser face to face as it was to be hanged, and it was much less final.

The courtyard was crowded with soldiers in dazzling uniforms, who clinked swords and flashed spurs, and had golden eagles on their helmets. Hussars passed him with hanging azure cloaks, and everyone looked at him out of a world in which no one as inconspicuous as Hermann had ever dared to breathe.

They walked through interminable corridors, preceded by footmen with powdered heads, beckoned at, and waved away, by superior people in uniforms, till at last they came to a shining suite of rooms with fewer officers and more silence. In one of them they waited by themselves, and then a door opened, a hand beckoned to Hermann, mesmerically, and he found himself propelled forward by his two guards into a farther room, alone.

It was a small room full of sunshine and very quiet. There was only a young man in it, standing before a desk. He looked up as Hermann entered, with grave, curious eyes, not without kindness. Hermann felt confused and distressed. He was not sure whether this was the Kaiser or not, but to be on the safe side he went nearer to the desk and bowed very low.

'I sent for you,' said the young man after a pause, 'because I wanted you to tell me why you assassinated one of

my ministers?'

And then Hermann knew it was the Kaiser. He looked at him for a long while before he answered. When you are about to die, you feel (however well you have been brought up) very independent of kings. The young monarch before him had a kind, simple face, without arrogance or cruelty; but he was a monarch, and Hermann had to think carefully before he could find words which would reach the isolated and indurated intelligence of royalty. At last he said:

'I killed him because he could not understand. Your Majesty, Herr Excellenz Blinder was destroying Austria, and he had no wish to stop what he was doing. I tried first to make him understand, and then I saw that it was only by putting him out of the way altogether that what he was

doing could be stopped.

'The deaths of thousands go on day by day because there are half a dozen men like Herr Excellenz Blinder,

who cannot be stopped.'

'Do you think that I am one of them?' asked the young King sadly. 'I was flung into this war, and ever since I took my throne I have struggled to get out of it. Yet there are many who hold me responsible.'

'No one that I know blames Your Majesty,' said Hermann eagerly. 'We know that you have struggled, and we look for you to succeed. What I did was against a power which hinders all good efforts. A power that Your Majesty gave, perhaps, but which was being used (so it seemed to us) against your will!'

The young King walked to the window.

'It is true,' he murmured under his breath; 'I order but who obeys my orders? They tell me I have power, but by the time it has passed through the hands of my faithful servants, it is no longer doing what I meant it to do!'

'That is the fate of kings,' said Hermann earnestly. 'They have made a weapon with a human will and it turns against themselves. Armies, Your Majesty, support kings, but only when the kings obey the wills of their armies; and the will of an army is always war.'

The King moved a little restively under this judgment; it was impossible for him to accept any criticism of his army - he had been brought up on swords and the code

that goes with swords.

'My soldiers,' he said drily, 'are dving for me now: that does not look like disobedience.'

Hermann shook his head.

'Your Majesty,' he said firmly, 'human beings - all the people — not only this army that you call yours — are in danger of death: it is not your will they are obeying. for you have said you have no will to war - it is a crime of a few men who have ambitious wills and inhuman hearts. If you do not stop this disaster — then you are also obeying their wills."

'I don't always obey them,' said the King with a sudden smile, 'or else you would not be here now. I sent for you. I refused guards at our interview. I mean to give you your life. None of these things had the consent of my generals

or my ministers.'

Hermann, who had been so longing for life that the sun had looked dark to him, ignored all that he had suffered. Something in him, deeper than personal pain, forced the words out of his heart.

'Let me die,' he said quickly. 'I am only one man—but if you have power at all—use it to stop this war!'

The King sighed deeply.

'I do what I can,' he said after a pause, 'but I am not omnipotent. I have to think of my allies — of my country's place in the future — of my word — and my servants' words. I can give you your life because, as you say, it is a little thing. I am allowed the freedom of small mistakes, but to bring about peace, single-handed and alone,

I need more than my will to peace.'

Hermann bowed his head. Once more he had come up against something he could not turn. It struck him that here was the tragedy of futility—it was no longer the gross cruelty of emphatic, misled force, nor the dull wickedness of selfish stupidity which could be destroyed. It was the inefficiency of a worn-out system. The young man before him knew what he ought to do and wanted to do it, but he could act no more than a jewelled image in a shrine. For all his gorgeous retinue, his gilded rooms, the flashing of a thousand swords at his nod, the Kaiser was more powerless than Hermann himself; for no modern king has ever shot one of his ministers.

'What I can do I will,' the Kaiser said earnestly; and moving back from the window to his desk, he wrote out

an order for Hermann's immediate release.

'Go now,' he said in a low voice, 'tell your comrades that I too work with you—ask them to be patient a little.

Some day soon I hope for peace.'

The guards reëntered the room, and once more Hermann passed through the long shining corridors full of old gilded furniture and rich and curious things which had no plain purposes — out into the courtyard, where the soldiers clicked heels and saluted, and the sun shone hot and bright upon their eagled helmets.

Hermann was free now, but it was not of his freedom that he was thinking as he stumbled home, confused and afraid.

PART III

The war was over at last. The uniforms had gone. There were no more azure cloaks, loosely hanging from drilled shoulders, no more golden eagles, no more trumpets, nor the flashing by of scarlet outriders.

The old palaces had become empty as shells left on the beach by a receding tide; the Royal Gardens, clipped and gorgeous, had sunk into an unkempt wilderness, filled with crowds of listless, hungry people — people who could do very much what they liked if there happened to be

anything they liked left.

Hermann had not been able to replace the vanished glories with his more splendid dreams. The ground was cleared of all the old impediments, but it was empty of fresh glories. If the shaky young Republic could wrestle successfully with the locust plague of its worthless paper money, its dying population, its circle of hostile and rapacious neighbours, then perhaps the wonders he had al-

ways believed in might come to pass.

But the Socialism which had (startled by its own success) replaced the flight of kings wasn't what Hermann had longed for. From the first, money had got into the wrong hands. Rings of profiteers and swindlers trod upon his ideals. People who were just as fond as their predecessors of bloodshed, of money, of having their own way, took high places in the Republic, and bartered its privileges in the public streets. The devil Hermann had never suspected was in some ways less fortified and entrenched than the devil he had known, but it was an even more active and less scrupulous devil.

Hermann devoted himself to shaking this new devil

whenever he could, and to refusing, even in the face of his wife's irate condemnation, the privileges that were thrust upon him by his new position.

Life came slowly back into the dying city, not the old life of elegance and ease, of sufficient wages and unending meals; but there was commerce and movement again, the shaken, blood-drained life of Europe was at last reviving.

Hermann plodded away as hard as ever — harder than ever — and believed that now his dreams would surely come true.

And then, at the very moment of promised security, the whole country shuddered at a new menace—the exiled Emperor made a sudden dramatic return. The new State, hardly sure as yet of life, was confronted by its violent extinction.

The refusal of the people came as quickly as the shock; and it was a fierce refusal. Nobody wanted their harmless young King, born and bred to rule, without the capacity to serve. The yoke of hunger was lifting already without his hand.

The Kaiser had no troops with him; he had returned full of hopes and plans, to the more distant of his countries, where he believed himself to be awaited with an enthusiasm which would waft him bloodlessly back onto his throne. He found no enthusiasm, no welcome, the support of the Great Powers was denied him. He hesitated, thought of his hussars, and, fearing bloodshed if he set them loose, turned back from the city which should have given him his crown, hesitated for a few more difficult, nervous days on its outskirts, while all Europe watched, and then retreated.

The Austrian workmen decided to cut off his retreat and to make no further return possible.

Hermann heard late at night of the Council's decision. His memories crowded thick upon him. He could see the young, kind face, the unpractical, vacillating eyes; he re-

membered the feeling he had had of being in the presence of a human being full of good intentions, implacably confronted by facts. This man had broken through rules and braved the hard displeasure of his servants to save Hermann; was he going to let him be torn to pieces by an angry crowd?

Hurriedly he rushed out from the meeting and found a car, which his name as a daring revolutionary alone obtained for him.

As he fled through the young spring night, towards the distant frontier station where the Kaiser's train was to be stopped, his mind misgave him. His steady, sober efforts mocked him. He risked more than he ever risked when he nerved himself to shoot Herr Excellenz Blinder. The most that could have happened to him then was the sacrifice of his life, but if he saved the Kaiser, he would have to pay for it with his dreams. The act he meant to perform would cut him off from his fellows: after this he would be suspect. The younger men would despise him for his moderation, the older men would distrust his motives. The power he possessed and was using day by day to save his new Republic would pass into reckless, undisciplined hands - perhaps it would even slip back, as power so easily slips, into the keeping of reactionaries. He had won a great position for himself, and, what he cared for far more, a chance for his dreams, by removing a tyrant. But would he not lose it all by keeping the symbol of an ancient tyranny alive?

Hermann did not flinch from his purpose, but he suffered very bitterly, and while he suffered he thought. Were there after all no rules? Had life always to be lived without plans, chaotically rising to meet emergency by the mere flickering light of the moment? Were there no fixed stars? No unmixed, steady millenniums? Were the forces of good and evil as blind as puss-in-the-corner — a child's game of groping hands and breathless escapes and sometimes no escape?

Hermann was tired when the dawn came, and he had to meet the sullen crowd awaiting their prey. They cheered him hoarsely when they found out who he was; his name passed from lip to lip. Here was the reënforcement they needed — the leader they would follow against the life of their King.

Hermann passed the agitated station-master and telegraph clerks, and, walking into the midst of the crowd,

began to speak.

He told them they were not out to kill a tyrant, but to murder a brother — an-ignorant and powerless brother.

He pictured to them the life of the young man they were working themselves up to destroy — its futility, its kindliness. He pointed out to them that, if they wished to prevent monarchy, as he himself wished to prevent it, they must not kill a chance-bred youth thrown in their way; they must go back to their city and secure and serve their Republic.

The train came in and was stopped. The engine-driver was dragged off the engine, but still Hermann spoke — he stood in the angry, swaying crowd pleading passionately and fiercely for the life which stood between him and his dreams.

He told the story of his own imprisonment, of his interview with the Kaiser struggling himself in the hands of old reactionary powers. He poured out his belief in the brotherhood of man, in the passing away of bloodshed and violence.

The Kaiser and his companions watched the listening crowd behind the saloon windows, and knew that death

hovered in the sunny air.

'The man in the middle is the man who is driving them to it,' the young officer by the King's side said. 'I believe I could pick him off with a long shot, and end the whole business — the rest are a set of curs — they'd run if he fell.'

'No, don't shoot,' said the King hurriedly. 'Only one man's going to be shot to-day if they board the train — I shall shoot myself. I've always had a horror of falling into the hands of a crowd.'

'He's got a dangerous face,' murmured the other adviser. 'Your Majesty mustn't stand so near the window.'

'It's curious,' said the Kaiser, 'but I have a feeling that I've seen the man before somewhere. I shouldn't have said it was a dangerous face.'

'By Jove,' said the first speaker, 'it's that fellow Braun, Your Majesty, the man who killed Blinder. I'm afraid there isn't the ghost of a chance for us — if he's got the crowd's ear!'

The King started forward suddenly.

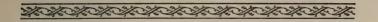
'No! No!' he said eagerly. 'If that's the man—we're saved! Don't you see they're putting the engine-driver back?'

Before his companions could stop him, the Kaiser had flung up the window and leaned out. Over the heads of the crowd his eyes met Hermann's; the two dreamers looked fixedly at each other, and then the Kaiser saluted his Socialist enemy; but Hermann didn't salute back because he didn't believe in military gestures. Instead he waved his hand to the engine-driver to start; the train began to glide out of the station, away from danger, away from death, away from the accomplishment of men's dreams.



THE LAST CRUSADER





THE LAST CRUSADER

LORD STORRINGTON looked at his son with that pride chequered by uneasiness common to most parents.

Alymer was so nearly the kind of son he wanted, that if anything went wrong with him, his expectations would

be proportionately let down.

Alymer was already a success. He had many of his father's talents, his ability to win men, his serious conservative instincts, his massive but not impenetrable discretion.

It had always been said of Lord Storrington that, although he never let anything out, he could be trusted,

without showing it, to take anything in.

Lord Storrington had made a great reputation in Europe, and an even greater one in the East, and with the wistfulness of old age, he longed to see his labours carried on, or even eclipsed by his own son.

Politically he and Alymer were at one; that was the main thing. He believed everything his father held to be true was true. But did he believe it in the same discreet and manageable way? Wasn't there, even in the most conservative of his theories, a dash of his mother's wildness?

He had unfortunately inherited her dangerous beauty, her picturesque half-starved look, stubborn mouth and winning Irish eyes. Alymer's was not a face which said, 'Give peace in our time, O Lord,' and after ten years in a hot climate carrying grave responsibilities and eating rich dinners, what Lord Storrington wanted was peace.

'Well, my dear boy,' he said kindly, 'you say you have something on your mind. The more mind there is, the less comfortable it is to have anything on it, so let us get it off at once. What is this grave matter? Not, I hope, money? Because I must tell you frankly I haven't got it. Harry has cleared me out as usual.'

'It isn't exactly money,' said Alymer with a veiled intensity, 'though I dare say it may lead to my having to ask for some later on. It's — it's — the condition of the world!'

Lord Storrington pushed back his glass of port and looked quizzically at his son from under his heavy eyebrows.

'If that's all,' he said cheerfully, 'I need hardly have come up to Town for it. The condition of the world has always been extremely bad; and I think I am right in

saving that it has never got any worse.'

'It's worse in this sense, sir,' said Alymer with the air of diffidence he kept for his superiors alone, and which was apt to give them a misleading idea of his docility: 'I no longer feel confidence in the Government. It's this cursed Irish question which has got under my skin. I don't feel safe about it. I don't feel as if I could be sure we're going to be loyal to Ulster.'

'I should fancy it would pay to be loyal to Ulster,'

said Lord Storrington reflectively.

Alymer brushed this consideration away with the disinterestedness of a man who has never known material want.

'It's not only Ulster,' he said with terrifying earnestness. 'I feel as if there was some spirit rising up against our whole standard of living which may drag us down

into chaos!'

Lord Storrington continued to drink his port with unmoved discrimination. 'There probably is,' he agreed calmly. 'But we shall need a lot of dragging down. After all, we have the larger resources. The State, the Army, the Press, and of course the Church, are solidly on our side. The rabble come up and take what they can get. I don't think we can prevent that, but they don't stay rabble when they've got it. They want to be like us; and they can't stay like us, you see, if they exterminate the species.

As to Ireland, it is naturally the creature nearest to us which provides us with most trouble. We've pampered Ireland shockingly for the last five years, under the mistaken impression that we were quieting her; but I've never yet seen anyone become quiet while they were being pampered. Ireland ought to have been kept low. The Roman Church and emigration could have been trusted in the course of a century or two to have bled her white. Then there wouldn't have been all this nonsense about coöperation, poets and creameries. Still I think you are exaggerating the immediate danger. Ireland will last our time.'

Alymer seemed scarcely to follow his father's reassuring common-sense. His eyes were fixed with an unwavering intensity upon an invisible disaster.

'If there is going to be a fight, I think I shall have to

be in it, sir,' he said after a pause.

'Well—no doubt in a sense you will be,' conceded Lord Storrington. 'There is no need to fight with your hands. Wits are more useful. Attend seriously to your diplomatic career, and you will be fighting on the right side with a weight that you couldn't obtain by any other means. After all, that's what you've been shaped for. People who don't use what they've got waste time, and their forces do not tell.'

'I'm afraid,' repeated Alymer, 'that I shall have to do something more direct and immediate. Even if there is no fighting for a year or two, I think I must go into politics at once, and give up diplomacy. I want to throw all

I've got onto my own side, Father!'

Lord Storrington refilled his glass and hid his growing uneasiness. This was exactly the kind of thing he didn't like — giving things up — and throwing all you'd got — were equally obnoxious phrases, symbolic of hysteria. When he spoke again there was a distinct edge to his voice.

'You haven't got very much, you know,' he observed. 'Politics cost a great deal of money, and it is some time before one has any weight to throw. As far as I can judge, you are not particularly fitted for politics. You have been trained at great expense, and with some success. for a different field. On the other hand, the Irish question has remained unaltered for three hundred years and several men of great distinction have broken their careers over it. Nothing can be easier than to break a promising career, and I assure you nothing is more difficult than to succeed in politics without money. You can do as you like, of course; most young men are in that happy position. Unfortunately they do not remain in it long, as they seldom continue to like a course which they have undertaken in opposition to every rule of common-sense. I shan't withdraw your supplies, but I can't increase them; you are a second son and have nothing to look for at my death. Of course you'll have to marry a fortune if you go in for politics. No doubt you have considered that point?'

Lord Storrington saw that his last shot had gone home. Alymer was already in love, quite suitably enough, with his cousin, Lady Winifred Dean; she was the daughter of an impecunious Irish earl; but if she had no money, she had everything else, and she was young. They could afford to wait five years, and this was what Lord Stor-

rington intended them to do.

Alymer got up and left the room. He left it with the abruptness of one who wants at the same time to get rid of an unpleasant thought, and Lord Storrington was reassured. He believed that many men are forced by circumstances to do what they dislike, but he did not believe that many men force themselves, against the weight of their instincts, to follow a course which they are not obliged to follow. 'Winifred will settle his hash!' was how Lord Storrington put it.

Alymer had never gone out of his way to charm women. He had a very high standard of what they ought to be, and with one exception they had all failed to attain it. Alymer wished women to be dignified and reposeful, to wear good clothes, to have spiritual integrity and great social poise. He didn't want to be run after, and he didn't want to have to speak twice. If women came up to his ideals, there were no limits to his chivalry; but if they didn't, he had nothing else to give them, not even fair play.

Alymer loved Winifred as a self-centred man with narrow vision loves once in a lifetime. Winifred was the one human being to whom he wanted to be kind, not because it was his duty, but because being kind to Winnie

sent him mad with pleasure.

When he went to see her, the day after his talk with his father, he was conscious of a curious sensation as if his blood was running cold and would never run warm again. In spite of having had everything his own way all his life, Alymer was not soft. He had forced himself to submit to an inner discipline, and had never tried to avoid either risk or pain. But he had never before forced himself to drive a being he loved into the shambles. The perspiration stood out on his forehead, he was conscious of an overwhelming desire to let his whole intention go, and to say to Winifred, 'Let's just be happy!'

In his imagination he had given up Winnie; but he had not foreseen what it would cost him to give up Winnie's happiness. He had to force himself on over the cruel words as if he were walking barefoot over knives.

Winnie thought it wonderful of him to want to save Ireland. She thought it wonderful of him to give up diplomacy; but she had not grasped what further sacrifices these wonders foretold.

'What I've got to do,' Alymer said in a strained voice, 'is simply to marry money, Winnie.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Lady Winifred, drawing in a quick, frightened breath. 'Not that American girl — that girl from Butte?'

'Yes,' said Alymer stiffly. 'That's what it's got to be,

my dear - that girl from Butte.'

Lady Winifred said nothing at all. She met Alymer's eyes unflinchingly and took their pain. She read in them quite clearly that, if he broke her heart, he broke his own. And she was satisfied; he had a perfect right to break both their hearts; but even Winifred felt that he would not have had a right to break only one of them.

Miss Elsie Banks, of Butte, Montana, lent herself to the situation without perhaps fully understanding what it implied. She made a handsome settlement upon her husband, and she discovered in the early hours of their honeymoon that this was all she was expected to make.

The European war intervened favourably upon their domestic prospects. Alymer joined up immediately and fought heroically. He fought all the better because he believed that the world was being saved for Imperialism. He had momentary panics over Lord Lansdowne's letter and Wilson's fourteen points, but these dangers soon evaporated, leaving Arches of Triumph and the Treaty of Versailles in their place.

When Alymer returned to England, a Tory Government was in power, prices and wages were going down, unemployment and taxation were going up. There was only one dark spot on the horizon. England, cornered by the League of Nations, and with an anxious eye upon her American debts, might give way to Ireland. She had, it is true, sent over the Black and Tans, but if coercion failed, would she increase her efforts, or limply give in?

Alymer saw his duty as plainly as usual, and through the influence of his father was given an important command in the Black and Tans. When he told his wife what he had done, Elsie looked at him with something that even Alymer saw was horror in her eyes.

'Ah, no! Alymer, you will not!' she exclaimed. 'I

couldn't bear it!'

'I don't know what on earth you mean,' replied Alymer. 'I've asked for a command, and I've got it. What

can't you bear?'

'You won't,' she said, 'take it, surely, when you realize how I feel! My grandfather was a Fenian; love of Ireland is in my blood. It's been hard enough to live in England and see what is going on over there, but I couldn't stand sharing the name of one of Ireland's persecutors!'

'I'm sorry,' said Alymer coldly, 'if I'm going against some obscure strain in your blood. I have a perfectly plain duty to perform against traitors, and as my wife I'm afraid you'll have to endure my performing it.'

Elsie leaned forward impressively. 'But, Alymer,' she said, 'think how very little I'm your wife! You've never taken our marriage seriously, have you? And I'm aware that you haven't even taken your lapses from it seri-

ously; but there have been lapses.'

Alymer did not contradict her. He took out a cigarette, lit it, and kept his singularly cool and rather amused eves on her face. This was a woman he didn't mind hurt-

ing.

'I have seen my lawyer,' Elsie went on, 'and I understand that I have a case against you if I choose to take it up. You have not only been unfaithful to me, but you have, technically speaking, deserted me. For two years you spent your leaves elsewhere and never came near me. You contributed nothing to my support, and when I wrote begging you to return, you replied by asking me to have your fishing rods sent out to France.'

'Didn't I thank you for having sent them?' asked Aly-

mer in real concern. 'They arrived in perfect order. I

feel almost sure I wrote and thanked you!'

His wife made a gesture of exasperation. 'I'm not alluding to your manners,' she said bitterly. 'I dare say they have been better than your morals, though that's not saying very much. I've been patient, Alymer. You married me for my money, but I thought you might be going to offer me some equivalent. You haven't - yet. I have my honor to protect as well as yours. I'm not going to be the wife of a man who commands the Black and Tan troops in Ireland!'

'I don't see what kind of dishonor you attach to putting down a rebellion,' said Alymer, 'but I'm perfectly willing to meet you halfway in the question of your affections. I never refused to return to you; I merely put it off to a more convenient occasion. I thought you realized that ours was a marriage of mutual interest, and that you would amuse yourself in my absence. I must plead guilty to some little omissions in the matter of leaves, but here I am back again, and ready to fulfil all my marital duties.'

Elsie rose with a swiftness which lacked the repose

Alymer admired in women.

'If I can help it,' she said, 'and I mean to help it, I'll never speak another word to you again. You're not a gentleman, Alymer Storrington, that's what's the matter

with vou!'

Alymer was merely amused at this fantastic charge, but he was less amused when he found that his wife had left the house half an hour later. He had all the bother of going up to Town to see his lawyers, and he was dismayed to find that they suggested his trying a method of conciliation.

'The girl's mad,' he explained to the head of the firm, who was an old family friend, with a shrewd knowledge of the Storrington temperament. 'I've done nothing to annoy her. I rather admire her in a way. Can't you write to her for me; say she's got no case at all and had better come back?'

'I don't think that would quite do,' replied the lawyer. 'It would be better if you wrote the letter yourself — and made it rather strong — I mean made the spirit of conciliation rather strong.'

Perhaps Alymer did not make it quite strong enough. In any case Elsie returned no answer, nor would she admit him, when, urged by his lawyer, he actually took the trouble to call at her hotel.

It was a curiously upsetting episode. It appeared that modern judges took a lax view of marriage. They accused Alymer of gross mental cruelty, and positively advised Elsie to return to Butte. With her went her enormous fortune and the possibility of Alymer's political career. It is true that Alymer could have retained the settlement money had it occurred to him to follow his lawyer's advice. His own reason, however, appeared to him to be more cogent. 'I put up with the girl,' he explained, 'for the sake of the money; I couldn't possibly touch the money, you see, if I don't have to be bothered with the girl.'

Alymer went to Ireland a shade less at home in the world and a shade more contemptuous of its methods than if this domestic incident had not taken place. He was advised from Headquarters that his list of reprisals was considered too drastic. This deepened his sense of wrong. He saw England weakening, England fearful of her own weapons and uncertain of her aims. The fear of his country's surrender worked like poison in his blood. All day long and half the night Alymer worked for the destruction of his enemies. He laid more traps, set more ambushes, killed, burned, imprisoned, terrorised, until he was suddenly recalled to Dublin and asked to hand in his resignation.

'Resign!' he said to his superior officer in amazement. 'Good Lord, I've only just begun! Give me a free hand a little longer, and I'll clean the whole place up for you!'

'No,' said his Commander, 'the free-hand business is over. You've gone beyond your orders, Storrington. I warned you last week there'd be enquiries. We can't go on like this. I see you can't modify, so I think you'd better go!'

Alymer nodded grimly. 'It's true I can't modify,' he said, 'I'd be ashamed to. Surely, after all this, we're not

going to cave in to Ireland?'

'Well, you see for yourself this talk going on about a conference and a truce,' replied his companion uneasily.

'We've got to go with the tide, Storrington.'

'Yes, if we're a piece of driftwood, we may have to,' said Alymer, rising to his feet. 'I suppose I resign or I'm chucked?'

'Yes, I'm afraid it amounts to that,' admitted his Commander.

'Well — I won't resign,' said Alymer; 'chuck me! I prefer it — and please say what you chuck me for. I came to steer and they ask me to drift. Well, I'm no drifter; I'd rather drown.'

'It's a pity to be so extreme,' urged his Commander. 'It'll go against you later on in any career you take up.'

'Careers for men like me are over,' said Alymer. 'This is the last ditch, and what I propose to do is to die in it.'

'You can't mean what you say,' protested his Commander.

Alymer did not repeat his words, neither did he take them back. He went out to look for the ditch.

Lord Storrington was dead; he had not cut up well. After his eldest son took the estate and various unmarried daughters were provided for, Alymer found himself practically penniless. He had overdrawn his account, and had barely five pounds in his pockets.

It is a very curious thing for a man who has always been above any form of material want to find that he has no money.

There were strings Alymer could have pulled, and friends with whom he could easily have stayed, but not on five pounds. Nor was Alymer accustomed to pull strings or to consider disagreeable financial alternatives. He shook the dust of Ireland off his feet and took a first-class ticket to a place he knew near the Scotch border.

It was sunset when he stepped out of the train. The light that bathed the still September hills was silvery and thin. Alymer recognised with wistful regret that it would have been a very good light for shooting partridges.

When he reached the top of the heather-covered hills, he sat down under a blackthorn bush and lit a cigarette. He thought over what he had given up for his cause: Winifred, his political future, the friendship and approval of his class; and he saw that, in spite of his sacrifices, his cause was lost.

A brewer had taken Winifred; Elsie had carried his political future back to Butte; and Ireland faced the precarious destiny of Freedom. The tomb of his God was in the hands of the Infidel; but Alymer had at least helped to pave the way to it with corpses. His purpose had failed, but his conscience was as clean as a child's. He had no fear of death; but he would have liked to make his end carry weight.

There was the death of that woman Douglas, for instance, who stopped the Derby by running in front of the horses. It was an unsporting thing to stop a race, and women were better without votes, but her action had advertised the question not unfavourably.

Then there was that fellow Terence MacSwiney, the ex-Mayor of Cork. He had starved himself to death for Ireland, a piece of rebellious folly; but no one could deny he had made rather a haunting thing of it.

Alymer was sorry he had not been able to starve himself to death for England; but England only offered that incentive to her unemployed. He had tried to die for his country many times when he was in France, but the war — that companionable, compulsory business — wasn't at all the same thing. What Alymer wanted was a more singular and voluntary martyrdom; only he was too fastidious to make a splash about so private a thing as his own death.

He made a little note in his pocketbook. 'I consider this fifth-rate plebeian land, without a shred of honour, unfit to live in. Since we have betrayed Ulster and given freedom to felons, I prefer to die'; and he signed it, 'Alymer Victor St. John Storrington.' He couldn't make it more spectacular than that.

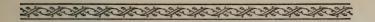
He stopped thinking; he dreamed instead of Winifred's eyes before he had put out the light in them; he dreamed of success along the dignified pathway he had chosen, and sacrificed — to a dream — the dream of a diviner world. more rigorous, more noble, where the rabble had no rights and the feudal system was set like a golden ladder between heaven and earth.

When he had finished smoking his cigarette - for though he put a high price on his dreams they were all short - he shot himself neatly through the temple with his Service revolver.

A party of gipsies found his body in the morning under the blackthorn bush; but they omitted to mention the matter to the police from motives of discretion; they merely removed the very small sum they found in his pockets, and threw the notebook containing Alymer's final challenge to the world into the nearest ditch.







HENRY

For four hours every morning, and for twenty minutes before a large audience at night, Fletcher was locked up with murder.

It glared at him from twelve pairs of amber eyes; it clawed the air close to him, it spat naked hate at him, and watched with uninterrupted intensity, to catch him for one moment off his guard.

Fletcher had only his will and his eyes to keep death

at bay.

Of course outside the cage, into which Fletcher shut himself nightly with his twelve tigers, were the keepers, standing at intervals around it with concealed pistols; but they were outside it. The idea was that if anything happened to Fletcher they would be able by prompt action to get him out alive; but they had his private instructions to do nothing of the kind, to shoot straight at his heart, and pick off the guilty tiger afterwards to cover their intention. Fletcher knew better than to try to preserve anything the tigers left of him, if once they had started in.

The lion-tamer in the next cage was better off than Fletcher; he was intoxicated by a rowdy vanity which dimmed fear. He stripped himself half naked every night, covered himself with ribbons, and thought so much of himself that he hardly noticed his lions. Besides, his lions had all been born in captivity, were slightly doped; and were only lions.

Fletcher's tigers weren't doped because dope dulled their fears of the whip and didn't dull their ferocity; captivity softened nothing in them, and they hated man.

Fletcher had taught tigers since he was a child; his father had started him on baby tigers, who were charming. They hurt you as much as they could with an ab-

sent-minded roguishness difficult to resist; what was death to you was play to them; but as they couldn't kill him, all the baby tigers did was to harden Fletcher and teach him to move about quickly. Speed is the tiger's long suit, and Fletcher learned to beat them at it. He knew by a long-trained instinct when a tiger was going to move, and moved quicker so as to be somewhere else. He learned that tigers must be treated like an audience, though for different reasons; you must not turn your back upon them, because tigers associate backs with springs.

Fletcher's swift eyes moved with the flickering sureness of lightning — even quicker than lightning, for while lightning has the leisure to strike, Fletcher had to avoid being struck by something as quick as a flash and much

more terrible.

After a few months the baby tigers could only be taught by fear, fear of a whiplash, fear of a pocket pistol which stung them with blank cartridges; and above all the mysterious fear of the human eye. Fletcher's father used to make him sit opposite him for hours practising eyes. When he was only ten years old, Fletcher had learned never to show a tiger that he was afraid of him. 'If you ain't afraid of a tiger, you're a fool,' his father told him; 'but if you show a tiger you're afraid of him, you won't even be a fool long!'

The first thing Fletcher taught his tigers, one by one in their cages, was to catch his eye, then he stared them down. He had to show them that his power of mesmerism was stronger than theirs; if once they believed this, they might believe that his power to strike was also stronger. Once Fletcher had accustomed tigers to be outfaced, he could stay in their cages for hours in compara-

tive safety.

The next stage was to get them used to noise and light. Tigers dislike noise and light, and they wanted to take it out of Fletcher when he exposed them to it.

When it came to the actual trick teaching, Fletcher relied on his voice and a long stinging whip. The lion-tamer roared at his lions; Fletcher's voice was not loud; but it was as noticeable as a warning bell, it checked his

tigers like the crack of a pistol.

For four hours every morning, Fletcher, who was as kind as he was intrepid, frightened his tigers into doing tricks. He rewarded them as well; after they had been frightened enough to sit on tubs, he threw them bits of raw meat. He wanted them to associate tubs with pieces of raw meat, and not sitting on tubs with whips; attempting to attack him, which they did during all transition stages, he wanted them to associate with flashes from his pocket pistol, followed by the impact of very unpleasant sensations. Their dislike of the pistol was an important point; they had to learn to dislike it so much that they would, for the sake of their dislike, sacrifice their fond desire to obliterate Fletcher.

Fletcher took them one by one at first and then rehearsed them gradually together. It was during the

single lessons that he discovered Henry.

Henry had been bought, rather older than the other tigers, from a drunken sailor. The drunken sailor had tearfully persisted that Henry was not as other tigers, and that selling him at all was like being asked to part with a talented and only child.

"E 'as a 'eart!' Henry's first proprietor repeated over

and over again.

Fletcher, however, suspected this fanciful statement of being a mere ruse to raise Henry's price, and watchfully

disregarded its implications.

For some time afterwards, Henry bore out Fletcher's suspicions. He snarled at all the keepers, showed his teeth and clawed the air close to Fletcher's head exactly like the eleven other tigers, only with more vim. He was a very fine young tiger, exceptionally powerful and large;

the polished corners of the Temple did not shine more brilliantly than the lustrous striped skin on Henry's back, and when his painted impassive face, heavy and expressionless as a Hindoo idol's, broke up into activity, the very devils believed and trembled. Fletcher believed, but he didn't tremble — he only sat longer and longer,

closer and closer to Henry's cage, watching.

The first day he went inside, there seemed no good reason, either to Henry or to himself, why he should live to get out. The second day something curious happened. While he was attempting to outstare Henry and Henry was stalking him to get between him and the cage door, a flash of something like recognition came into Henry's eyes, a kind of 'Hail fellow well met!' He stopped stalking and sat down. Fletcher held him firmly with his eves: the great painted head sank down and the amber eyes blurred and closed under Fletcher's penetrating gaze. A loud noise filled the cage, a loud, contented, pleasant noise. Henry was purring! Fletcher's voice changed from the sharp brief order like the crack of a whip into a persuasive, companionable drawl. Henry's eves reopened; he rose, stood rigid for a moment, and then slowly the rigidity melted out of his powerful form. Once more that answering look came into the tiger's eyes. He stared straight at Fletcher without blinking and jumped on his tub. He sat on it impassively, his tail waving, his great jaws closed. He eyed Fletcher attentively and without hate. Then Fletcher knew that this tiger was not as other tigers; not as any other tiger.

He threw down his whip, Henry never moved; he approached Henry, Henry lifted his lip to snarl, thought better of it, and permitted the approach. Fletcher took his life in his hand and touched Henry. Henry snarled mildly, but his great claws remained closed; his eyes expressed nothing but a gentle warning, they simply said: 'You know I don't like being touched, be careful, I might

have to claw you!' Fletcher gave a brief nod; he knew the margin of safety was slight, but he had a margin. He could do something with Henry.

Hour after hour every day he taught Henry, but he taught him without a pistol or a whip. It was unnecessary to use anything beyond his voice and his eyes. Henry read his eyes eagerly. When he failed to catch Fletcher's meaning, Fletcher's voice helped him out. Henry did not always understand even Fletcher's voice, but where he differed from the other tigers was that he wished to understand; nor had he from the first the

slightest inclination to kill Fletcher.

He used to sit for hours at the back of his cage waiting for Fletcher. When he heard far off — unbelievably far off — the sound of Fletcher's step, he moved forward to the front of his cage and prowled restlessly to and fro till Fletcher unlocked the door and entered. Then Henry would crouch back a little, politely, from no desire to avoid his friend, but as a mere tribute to the superior power he felt in Fletcher. Directly Fletcher spoke, he came forward proudly and exchanged their wordless eye language.

Henry liked doing his tricks alone with Fletcher. He jumped on and off his tub following the mere wave of Fletcher's hand. He soon went further, jumped on a high stool and leapt through a large white paper disc held up by Fletcher. Although the disc looked as if he couldn't possibly get through it, yet the clean white sheet always yielded to his impact; he did get through it, blinking a little, but feeling a curious pride that he had faced the

odious thing; and pleased Fletcher.

He let Fletcher sit on his back, though the mere touch of an alien creature was repulsive to him. But he stood perfectly still, his hair rising a little, his teeth bared, a growl half suffocated in his throat. He told himself it was Fletcher. He must control his impulse to fling him off and tear him up.

In all the rehearsals and performances in the huge arena, full of strange noises, blocked with alien human beings, Henry led the other tigers; and though Fletcher's influence over him was weakened, he still recognized it. Fletcher seemed farther away from him at these times, less sympathetic and godlike, but Henry tried hard to follow the intense persuasive eyes and the brief emphatic voice; he would not lose touch even with this attenuated ghost of Fletcher.

It was with Henry and Henry alone that Fletcher dared his nightly stunt, dropped the whip and stick at his feet and let Henry do his tricks as he did them in his cage alone, with nothing beyond Fletcher's eyes and voice to control him. The other eleven tigers, beaten glaring and snarling onto their tubs, sat impassively despising Henry's unnatural docility. He had the chance they had always wanted, and he didn't take it — what kind of tiger

was he?

But Henry ignored the other tigers. Reluctantly, standing with all four feet together on his tub, he contemplated a further triumph. Fletcher stood before him, holding a stick between his hands and above his head; intimately, compellingly, through the language of his eyes Fletcher told Henry to jump from his tub over his head. What Fletcher said was: 'Come on, old thing! Jump! Come on! I'll duck in time. You won't hurt me! It's my stunt! Stretch your old paws together and jump!' And Henry jumped. He hated the dazzling lights. loathed the hard, unexpected, senseless sounds which followed his leap, and he was secretly terrified that he would land on Fletcher. But it was very satisfactory when after his rush through the air he found he hadn't touched Fletcher, but had landed on another tub carefully prepared for him; and Fletcher said to him as plainly as possible before he did the drawer trick with the other tigers: 'Well! You are a one-er and no mistake!'

The drawer trick was the worst of Fletcher's stunts. He had to put a table in the middle of the cage, and whip each tiger up to it. When he had them placed each on his tub around the table, he had to feed them with a piece of raw meat deftly thrown at the exact angle to reach the special tiger for which it was intended, and to avoid contact with eleven other tigers ripe to dispute this intention. Fletcher couldn't afford the slightest mistake or a fraction of delay. Each tiger had to have in turn his piece of raw meat, and the drawer shut after it — opened — the next morsel thrown exactly into the grasp of the next tiger, and so on, until the twelve were fed.

Fletcher always placed Henry at his back. Henry snatched in turn his piece of raw meat, but he made no attempt, as the other tigers always did, to take anyone else's; and Fletcher felt the safer for knowing that Henry was at his back. He counted on Henry's power to protect him more than he counted on the four keepers standing outside the cage with their pistols. More than once, when one of the other tigers turned restive, Fletcher had found Henry, rigid, but very light on his toes, close to his side, between him and danger.

The circus manager spoke to Fletcher warningly about

his foolish infatuation for Henry.

'Mark my words, Fletcher,' he said, 'the tiger doesn't live that wouldn't do you in if it could. You give Henry too many chances — one day he'll take one of them!'

But Fletcher only laughed. He knew Henry; he had seen the soul of the great tiger leap to his eyes and shine there in answer to his own eyes. A man does not kill his god; at least not willingly. It is said that two thousand years ago he did some such thing, through ignorance; but Fletcher forgot this incident. Besides, on the whole he believed more in Henry than he did in his fellow men. This was not surprising, because Fletcher had very little

time for human fellowship. When he was not teaching tigers not to kill him, he rested from the exhaustion of the nerves which comes from a prolonged companionship with eager, potential murderers; and the rest of the time Fletcher boasted of Henry to the lion-tamer; and taught Henry new tricks.

Macormack, the lion-tamer, had a very good stunt lion, and he was extravagantly jealous of Henry. He could not make his lion go out backwards before him from the arena cage into the passage as Henry had learned to do before Fletcher; and when he had tried, Ajax had, not seriously but with an intention rather more than playful, flung him against the bars of the cage.

Macormack brooded deeply on this slight from his

pet, and determined to take it out of Fletcher's.

'Pooh!' he said. 'You call yourself damned plucky for laying your ole 'oof on 'Enry's scruff, and 'e don't 'alf look wicked while you're doin' it. Why don't yer put yer 'ead in 'is mouf and be done with it? That ud be talking, that would!'

'I wouldn't mind doing it,' said Fletcher reflectively, after a brief pause, 'once I get him used to the idea. 'Is jaw ain't so big as a lion's, still I could get the top of me

'ead in.'

The lion-tamer swaggered off jeering, and Fletcher thought out how best to lay this new trick before Henry

for his approval.

But from the first Henry didn't approve of it. He showed quite plainly that he didn't want his head touched. He didn't like his mouth held forcibly open, and wouldn't have anything put between his teeth without crunching. Fletcher wasted several loaves of bread over the effort — and only succeeded once or twice gingerly and very ungracefully in getting portions of his own head in and out in safety. Henry roared long and loudly at him, clawed the air, and flashed all the lan-

guage he could from his flaming eyes into Fletcher's, to explain that this thing wasn't done between tigers! It was hitting below the belt! An infringement of an instinct too deep for him to master; and Fletcher knew that he was outraging Henry's instinct, and decided to refrain.

'It ain't fair to my tiger!' he said to himself regretfully; and he soothed Henry with raw meat and endearments, promising to refrain from his unnatural venture.

But when the hour for the performance came, Fletcher forgot his promise. He was enraged at Macormack's stunt lion for getting more than his share of the applause. He had the middle cage, and what with the way Macormack swaggered half naked in his scarlet ribbons, and the lion roared — that pulverising, deep-toned, desert roar — and yet did all his tricks one after the other like a little gentleman, it did seem as if Henry barely got a round of his due applause.

Henry jumped through his white disc - so did the stunt lion! He took his leap over Fletcher's head — the stunt lion did something flashy with a drum, not half as dangerous, and the blind and ignorant populace ignored

Henry and preferred the drum.

'I don't care!' said Fletcher to himself. 'Henry's got to take my head in his mouth whether he likes it or not - that'll startle 'em!'

He got rid of all the other tigers. Henry was used to that, he liked it; now he would do his own final stunt walk out backwards into the passage which led to the cages, and Fletcher would hurry out through the arena and back to Henry's cage, give him a light extra supper, and tell him what a fine tiger he was.

But Fletcher called him into the middle of the stage instead and made him take that terrible attitude he had taught him for the new trick. His eyes said: 'You'll do

this once for me, old man, won't you?'

Henry's eyes said: 'Don't ask it! I'm tired! I'm hungry!

I want to get out!'

But Fletcher wouldn't read Henry's eyes any more. He tried to force his head sideways into the terrible open jaws, and Henry's teeth, instinctive, reluctant, compelled, closed on Fletcher's neck.

What Henry minded after the momentary relief of his instinctive action was the awful stillness of Fletcher. It wasn't the stillness of the arena — that was nothing, a mere deep indrawn breath. Fletcher lay limp between his paws, as if the trick were over, as if all tricks were over. He wouldn't get up, he didn't look at Henry. Henry's eyes gazed down unblinkingly into the blank eyes of Fletcher. All Henry's soul was in his eyes watching for Fletcher's soul to rise to meet them. And for an age nothing happened, until at last Henry realised that nothing eyer would.

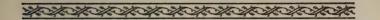
Before the nearest keeper shot Henry, Henry knew that he had killed his god. He lifted up his heavy painted head and roared out through the still arena, a loud de-

spairing cry.

His heart was pierced before they reached his heart.







BLUE CLAY

I was perilously near forty, and the only thing I liked about it was the immunity I felt from wanting to affect the destinies of others. I do not say that people no longer interested me, but I knew in a flash the particular specimens who wouldn't: and if I was let in rather more deeply than I cared for over the singular case of Sylvia Cartwright, I had at least the consolation of knowing that her case was singular, and that if one had anything to do with her at all one was bound to be let in. What she broke down in me - and I have never been able to piece it together since — was an increasing self-complacence. I wrote myself: and my world thought that I was a genius. I do not think I ever went as far as this myself, but I was a little too satisfied with what I called 'my work,' and I thought sophistication, tactful amenities, witty phrases, and the outward beauty of pleasantly absorbed privileges were compatible with masterpieces. I congratulated myself upon giving entertainments which were considered rather more amusing than other people's, upon a marriage which I knew to be more successful than the generality of marriages, and above all, I flattered myself upon the skill with which I handled my artists, so that I kept the cream of them for my guests, and yet never involved anyone who met them with the pecuniary or conventional embarrassment so often to be found in an artist's private life. I think I had not recognised that my artists were not different in kind from myself. They were merely people - who had, from luck or privilege, bounded with enough aplomb to be noticed, into the lack-lustre and overstocked arena of the creative world. 'Of course what they find in you,' my friends observed, 'is fellow feeling. It must be so wonderful to be an artist yourself.' The greatest of my artists was most certainly old Antonio Rosselli, and I was pleased when he said he wanted to paint my portrait because I had a face which perfectly represented to him the purest type of an English gentlewoman. 'You have,' he said, 'the head of a Reynolds — of a Romney. It is exactly what I want to catch — the contrast!' 'The contrast?' I asked interestedly; 'with whom are you going to contrast me, Signor Maestro?' 'A little image in my mind,' Antonio murmured. 'But it has nothing to do with you that — you would not understand.' I smiled patiently. Signor Rosselli was very famous, and very famous people can afford to tell almost anyone that they do not understand.

I went to his studio for my first sitting on one of those golden Roman afternoons, when the flowers in the street seem twice as large and three times as brilliant as they seem anywhere else; and light and air have become an indissoluble substance which passes into the blood.

The big bare studio was half empty, and across a sea of light I met the eyes of Rosselli's last portrait, and knew that I was looking at one of the great portraits of the world. Eyes can only look at you like that out of a picture when the artist has got not only his subject into his soul but his very soul into his subject. Velasquez's Pope is the best illustration of what I mean. It is not only Innocent the Tenth who looks out of the canvas with those astute and penetrating eyes; Velasquez is there too, measuring you as he measured Innocent the Tenth; immortally at work upon human substances.

Antonio Rosselli's portrait was of a little modern girl. Rosselli hadn't bothered much about her square mop of bobbed hair — it made a good enough setting for that mysterious face, and was, one could see, as conventional to him as the bend of a gold wing behind one of Fra Angelico's angels; he had spent himself on her eyes, grey and a little misty. I think they were the most innocent

eyes I ever saw, but the word innocence is flat and insignificant to express the quality of surprise in them. It was as if she was looking unprepared and, for the first time, into the pit of life. Most of us never see the real world at all; it is blocked off from us by the padding of security. The tingling, actual quality of life comes to us like the echo of the sea in a shell, through our jaded senses. You saw in the eyes of this girl that she had never known security, and that her senses were played upon by reality, without the interposition of a single sham. The expression in her eyes was deeper than sorrow, and beyond mere panic (though I think there was fear in it). She was just mortally interested; and careless, beyond any limit of personal courage, for her own safety. The little vivid face had no dignity, no self-respect, and above all no self-consciousness. All her consciousness, and I was to learn later how intense it was, was out upon the path of her curiosity. Yet they were beautiful tender eyes, the whole upper part of her face under its fringe of straight gold hair was as exquisite and mild as one of the cinquecento Madonnas. It left me quite unprepared for the brutal, ruthless shock of a mouth beneath — a mouth in which the teeth were too large and shining, like the teeth of a hungry animal.

'Oh!' I cried, 'Maestro, what a pity you made the

lower part of her face so ugly!'

'Ma—' laughed the Maestro, 'è brutto! I am not God, my delightful Lady Marian! I paint what I see, but I won't be responsible for the object. I painted that poverina as I saw her. But! I admit it, one hasn't always such a face to paint! I saw a great deal.'

We dropped the subject, and Rosselli ran back and forth from the middle of the room to his easel with his paint brush poised like a weapon, stabbing at his canvas with curious precision and eyes fixed like a gimlet. He hardly looked at me at all, except to see that the light

was as he wanted it — I believe he saw my face on the canvas more plainly than he saw me in my chair.

His portrait of me is considered one of his best, but I was never pleased with it myself. There was something in the face, or rather a lack of something, which I found disconcerting. The picture was graceful, dignified, even, I must admit, beautiful, but it was a beauty that had been used over and over again.

'I can't see that I am in the portrait at all,' I complained to my husband when we were alone with the picture. 'It is more like a pattern than a person!'

But my husband was enthralled by it. 'No! no!' he said, 'Rosselli was right! He told me when it was finished that he had succeeded in making a portrait of a perfect lady — of a perfect English lady — all the poise, the culture, the — the immaculateness, and, by Jove, he's done it! And I'm jolly proud it's you!'

Of course one likes one's husband to be proud of one—but I had a curious chill when he used the word immaculate. It made me think suddenly of those very stiff wooden dolls we used to play with as children on Sundays, when we weren't allowed to play with any of our

real toys.

It was two years before we returned to Rome. My husband had been appointed to the Embassy, and, while he was attending to his last duties in Greece, I went to the best hotel I could find until my household was complete. I had as quiet a room as Rome provides, and was waiting for the interminable noises of the streets to die down before going to bed, when I became aware of rather a marked disturbance going on in the room below me. Somebody was shouting and knocking furniture about; there were screams which sounded like drunken screams, snatches of wavering songs, one or two men's voices, and then the sound of a heavy crash and footsteps rushing along the passage. It was not the sort of hotel in which such noises

occur without a very serious cause. I therefore went to my door and opened it. I saw the manager, with a white scared face, dash down the passage, and after a few moments the sounds ceased, except for a peculiar singsong chant which sagged on, like the moaning of a drug fiend. A moment later a knock came at my door. It was the manager himself, usually a big flushed person with a gracefully deprecating swagger; he was now as dishevelled and crumpled as if he had been passed through a mangle. He couldn't, he assured me in a breaking voice. apologise enough! Such a thing had never! — but never! - happened in his hotel before! It was not possible, he had supposed, for it to happen! And he was in despair, he was incapacitated with horror at the disturbance for his guests. Two men — drunk — one renowned — he had turned out on the spot! A great Roman name — but no matter, he was in the gutter now — and it was the place for him — momentarily at any rate! But the lady! The lady was not only drunk — she had no clothes on! He apologised profoundly for mentioning such a fact! But she not only had no clothes on — she was English! Was it conceivable that such a thing could happen? An English lady without clothes, and who refused, quite simply refused, to put them on? He said nothing about her having thrown a clothes brush at him, but could he dare he - in that condition turn her out? And would she stop singing if he didn't? He threw himself upon my mercy! What was he to do? The lady was young, presumably mad, and he had given her a beautiful room because he was told she was a great poet and would bring him distinction. This was the distinction she was bringing him! Even the Italians complained; and when Italians complain of noise it is because it is noise! Probably all the other nationalities would leave the hotel tomorrow. He implored me to tell him what to do!

'Why do you come to me?' I asked severely.

'Because,' said the manager, wringing his hands, 'you are English, gracious lady! Surely in your high position you would not like one of your own compatriots to be turned out in such a condition at two o'clock in the morning! A great writer! A great poet! Would it not be a sacrilege? It occurred to me that perhaps you would most graciously consent to see the young lady and to persuade her in her own tongue to reassume her clothes so that she could be turned out? or at least to keep quiet, so that we could postpone turning her out until the morning!'

If there is one thing I dislike more than being asked what other people should do, it is being told what I should do myself. I felt outraged with the manager and was about to tell him so, when the knocking downstairs began again, and the wavering bars of a street song called 'Nostalgia' rose upon the air. The manager put his hands up to his hair and literally pulled some of it out. I had often heard of this emotional reaction; but I had never witnessed it before. Like most descriptions of unusual behaviour I found the mental image misleading. Very little of the manager's hair came out, although he pulled at it forcibly for some time.

'Very well,' I said resignedly, 'I will go down and see what I can do, but please send my maid Marguerite after me with my opera cloak. What is the number of

the room?'

I need not have asked. Four chambermaids, three boys usually associated with buttons, and the night porter, were picturesquely grouped outside the door. I dismissed them with some sharpness, knowing that they would return directly my back was turned, knocked and entered.

To say that the room was in disorder would be to belittle fact. There was not an object, except the bed, where it had a right to be, or devoting itself to the office for which it was made. The wardrobe lolled against a smashed window having disgorged its contents upon the floor. The dressing-table was locked in a death grapple with a chest of drawers. The contents of the washstand were under the table. Clothes, champagne bottles, the claws of lobsters, and liqueur glasses were heaped confusedly together on rather a good Axminster carpet. No chair remained upright. Crouched upon a small sofa with her hands crossed under her feet, swinging gently to and fro, and without a stitch of clothing to cover her, was the original of Rosselli's portrait. I should have known her anywhere, and this, I suppose, is a tribute to her originality, for there are very few people I should know anywhere without their clothes on, at two o'clock in the morning.

Her eyes still held their curious innocence of regard. It was as if nothing that had happened to her had really touched her at all. Marguerite followed me, disapproving, as only a really good maid can disapprove, of the unusual. She had my ermine opera cloak over her arm, and her expression would have been suitable for the Day of Judgment.

'Place the cloak over this person's shoulders,' I said, 'and now go and bring me some very strong black coffee.'

'Miladi!' replied Marguerite. 'This is a hotel. There will be no kitchen fire in the middle of the night, and how am I to find coffee?'

'I do not know,' I said, 'but the whole staff is in the passage, and you will bring me the coffee in twenty minutes, very strong and boiling hot.'

'Then you aren't an earthquake?' my hostess remarked slowly and indistinctly; 'if you aren't an earthquake, what are you doing in my room?'

'Please keep that cloak on,' I said, 'until I find something of your own fit to wear. My name is Lady Marian Trefusis. Have you any night-gowns?'

'No,' the creature said with sudden meekness; 'I've

pawned them all. I had lovely ones once.'

Then she was sick. The girl was not only drunk, she was worn out with drugs and starvation. I could see that she was feverish, and there seemed nothing to do but make the bed (which had Shakespeare's Sonnets, a fountain pen, and a pink satin heel in it) and put her into it. She lay quite still, and seemed to like the sensation. She was slim without being gawky. I once saw a study by Whistler of a model of fourteen, leaning against a table in the rest hour, which was exactly like her. Her painted slash of a mouth contradicted, without effacing, the startling innocence of her eyes.

'You had one man here or two?' I asked, picking up an overturned chair and drawing it nearer the bed. 'I suppose you know such entertainments are not usual in the best hotels, and that you will be turned out to-

morrow?'

I wondered which of the two beings who inhabited her would answer me; her eyes fixed on mine had a curious expression, as if they looked at me out of another world. I have been liked and disliked in my time, but I don't remember ever having been looked at by anyone else, as if I didn't exist.

'I shan't be so tired then, I expect,' she murmured slowly. 'I'd forgotten about the bed. It's quite comfortable without those things in it. I had first one man, and then a friend I'd met at a café turned up. I'd forgotten I'd told him to come. It went all right at first, but

men get so rough when they're drunk.'

I stop here, not because she did; on the contrary, she raised her little bobbed head from the pillow and gave a pictorial but perfectly unprintable account of what men were like when they were drunk. I think Rabelais would have shrunk from some of the details.

'It is strange,' I said when she had finished, 'that

since you hate men so much you should ask them to come and see you?'

'Not really,' she murmured drowsily; 'you see things then. You don't know what I get out of hating! I'm tired of love by itself.' And then she buried her small

golden head in the pillow and fell asleep.

Marguerite brought the black coffee, and I took some myself and kept the rest hot in an electric cooker. Marguerite suggested a little sourly that she should take my place. But I refused her offer, and sent her off to bed. I felt that to sit there in that dishevelled room with a drunken poet was an experience I should hardly be likely to have again. 'You see things then,' I repeated over to myself. What did she mean that she saw? Immature, inexperienced, blankly ignorant of all the laws of the civilised world, how could she claim this special insight out of an experience so plainly sordid? What was there to see, except men behaving like animals and broken glass upon the floor? Yet she claimed that she had seen something which I could not see!

She slept until five o'clock in the morning, and then she woke shivering. I gave her some black coffee, and wondered if she was going to cry. She was no longer drunk, and she looked rather woe-begone, but I was thankful to perceive she meant to refrain from tears. She took my presence for granted, and, as soon as she had finished drinking her coffee, she asked for a pad and her fountain pen. I found the pad after some difficulty in a hatbox full of dirty evening gloves. Once more I enveloped her in my opera cloak, with an anxious eve to the ermine, and for two hours she wrote, her shock of hair shading her little pointed face, the electric light resting on her rather ugly, swift-moving finger and thumb. I sat and watched her with a curious sensation. It couldn't, of course, have been envy. She looked like a tool used by an invisible hand. I never saw any human being work more

relentlessly; her fingers skimmed from side to side of the paper with the ease and swiftness of a circling bird. When she paused (and occasionally she took a very long pause), she held herself as fixed as a creature about to spring, every nerve taut, every sense listening; the release came

as punctually, as completely, as the suspension.

At seven o'clock the noises of the hotel began, sloppy, sordid noises, bumps on doors, and the ineffectual scraping of brooms down corridors. She stopped writing suddenly and flung her pen down on the sheet. I had no time to take it from her before a trail of ink had crossed the linen and reached the ermine on my cuff. 'Shall I read it to you?' she asked me, and without waiting for an answer she lifted a husky, unresonant little voice into a kind of chant, and I heard the poem.

It was that unforgettable, nerve-racking poem which was afterwards called 'A Night in Rome.' But I have never, beautiful as it is, quite recaptured the feeling I had when I heard it first. In that squalid room the words rose to such heights and plumbed such bitter depths. It is the saddest poem in the world, and out of her blistered lips, with her feverish hand resting on the stained sheets, it sounded sadder still. I felt tears on my cheeks at the end

of it, and saw them running down her own.

'I think it's nearly all right,' she whispered, 'don't you? but I've got such an awfully sore throat! and my eyes

feel full of dust!'

She had tonsillitis and eventually pneumonia. I took her immediately to the hospital of the Blue Nuns, and behaved, I suppose, properly about her. I don't know what she'd done with her relations, but if she'd ever had any, they were not forthcoming. Several men turned up (one I knew) and shamefacedly admitted an acquaintance that they didn't explain. They wanted to do something for her, and one of them, who was in touch with an editor, got him to take the poem. I copied it out myself and

chose the title, because she'd forgotten to put any. I know that all my books will die, and I wonder if I shall go down to literary history as the person who chose a title for Sylvia Cartwright's poem 'A Night in Rome'? I think perhaps I deserved that much of fame.

As soon as she was well enough I went to see her, but we didn't get on at all. I hadn't the slightest wish for her to be grateful, but I had expected to find her interesting, and she was extremely dull. She did not wish to discuss her poetry, or her life, nor anyone else's poetry (as a matter of fact she had read very little) nor their lives. She took a morbid interest in her own symptoms, and complained of the doctor who had saved her life. She did not object, however, to the Blue Nuns; on the contrary, it was quite obvious that she liked them a great deal better than she liked me, and felt freer in her intercourse with them. I could have understood her dislike if she had felt any shame for her behaviour that night, but although she was a little hard and defiant with me, as if she felt she had violated my standard, she betrayed not the faintest indication of having any standard of her own.

Apparently the Blue Nuns had spoken with the utmost plainness to her, and told her exactly what would happen to her physically and mentally if she continued to live as she had been living. She was rather frightened by what they said, but neither angry nor remorseful. She simply said 'How awful! Because, of course, I can't

stop looking for things, can I?'

The second time I saw her at the hospital she was sitting out on a balcony with the view of the Campagna from the Cœlian Hill. The mountains were like blue transparent walls through which the gold air danced. The pink aqueducts wandered out over the long waves of the land, fixing their age-long strength in slender arches. Here and there an umbrella pine rose up, a solitary island in the blue wash of air. The almond blossoms were not yet in

flower, but the bare slender stems of the willow, brilliant orange and burnt amber, filled the blank spaces of the

Campagna with their tracery.

Sylvia gave me a hostile glance, which I must admit hurt me, like the dislike of a child. 'You bother me,' she said resentfully; 'please don't come and see me any more.'

'Very well,' I said, 'I won't. But before I go, I should

like to know very much why I bother you?'

She looked out towards the hills. I remember watching her eves rest on the delicate blue peak of Monte Cave where the Romans held their second-class triumphs.

'Oh, I don't know!' she exclaimed a little impatiently: 'vou're so tidy and kind, and nothing ever comes out of you straight. I know I'm a beast. I can't help it; you make me feel so queer in my heart, as if I were afraid to get like vou! You're very strong, aren't vou, all tied up inside? and I'm outside, all of me - every which way! and it's the way I want to be. I'm weak, you know, and I'm awfully afraid of people who could pull me in! I couldn't stay in, of course, but I'd break, I think, if they ever dragged me once inside. It isn't what you've done for me I mind. Though the Sisters keep telling me what I owe you. But you've got the money, haven't you? and besides, after all, money is nothing. But, oh, I do want so awfully just to be left alone!'

I told her that as far as I was concerned she should be left alone. My car was waiting at the door, but I sent it away; I wanted suddenly to walk back. But before I went I asked to see the Mother Superior. Mother Superiors often give one the impression of possessing supernatural lore, and the Mother of the Blue Nuns did not on

this occasion disappoint me.

'Why does she dislike me so?' I asked. 'Apparently it's not the usual reaction of ingratitude, because she simply doesn't know what she has to be grateful for. She's just informed me that money is of no consequence, though, as you tell me, she was half starved when she came here, I should have thought she must have learned the contrary. I've done my best to be kind to her, and I'm not in the least prejudiced, and yet she seems to prefer all of you — whom I should suppose to be a good deal sterner judges of the moral law than I am. I suppose you know she's persistently broken it, in every direction, for years?'

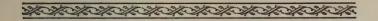
The Mother Superior waved her hand deprecatingly. 'Yes, ves,' she said, 'the poor child has lived a life of sin. There has been no attempt to conceal it, or our views of it. And you are not only a lady of the great world, and very broad-minded, but you have done what you call "everything" for her — and of course in a sense it is everything.' The Mother Superior paused and smiled at me in a curious, half-puzzled way. 'If I may say so,' she murmured, 'she perhaps prefers us because we are dedicated, and your little poet friend is also dedicated; that makes a point in common. I know it sounds strange, and I am afraid I cannot explain it very well, but about her work she has discipline, she obeys laws, she - she communicates with Something higher than herself. Your business, Lady Marian, is in this world, and I am sure that you do it admirably and that you are an example both to your little friend and to ourselves. But, forgive me! the world you live in is different. You were just now unable to understand how to a half-starved child money could be as nothing. But we understand her — to us also the joys, the privileges of this world are nothing! I admit that to most half-starved children, alas! money is everything; but when there is an inner light shining, even the aching needs of the body become like shadows. You have noticed, have you not, how firelight turns pale and vanishes when the sun pours through a window upon it? You will understand then what it is to have the Spirit pour down upon our little spirits, till hunger and cold, evil, and even what we call good, turn pale! Alas! our poor little one has much to learn! She is not a pure spirit; but there is something in her which is of the spirit, and she who is disobedient to all God's laws on earth is nevertheless not disobedient to the heavenly vision. We must hope and pray that she will learn not only to guard the sacred flame, but the temple into which It passes.'

I opened my lips to ask another question, and then shut them again, for I already knew the answer. Both the poet and the saint had rejected me. I was not even that

blue clay out of which diamonds shine.







THE WONDER-CHILD

I AM a doctor by profession; and my brother is a great violinist. There is, of course, first, Kreisler; then a long way off there are five others — I refrain from giving their names; but my brother is one of the five. Sometimes I think he plays better than they do. You can imagine I have listened to them with some attention, for if my profession is medicine my hobby is the violin! Sometimes he falls beneath them, for like all Viennese he is perhaps a shade too genial, too easy-going for the ruthlessness of Art; but I have heard him in his great moments shoot beyond them — spring like a star from world to world, where no one could follow him.

My brother is not married; my sister and I consider the subject often; but with the American market for European artists out of his power on account of the exchange, it is impossible to count upon sufficient for a good marriage. He has a great deal of temperament, and my sister thinks a wife would demand of him more than she would be at all likely to get. Also, if there were to be a family, he could no longer take his summer holidays in the mountains or follow the cures I often consider necessary. Nor could he afford to do the kind actions he often does for others.

I say this much about him that you may understand what follows. First, that his opinion as to his art is considered final in Vienna (he smells out a good pupil from the Prater to the Hofburg); and second, that you may realise that as well as being a good judge of violin-playing my brother Ernst is a man of heart and principle. I have never known him to do a mean action. His temper is good, with raw streaks in it such as are common to all artists. An artist has not the padding for the nerves that the rest of us have; it is worn off him in the

practice of his art and in the perpetual excitation of his emotions. If a man is to sweep you off your feet, he must have something to sweep with, must he not? And he cannot always keep this something neatly packed up in a box to be opened only on occasions when it gives us pleasure.

Twice a year Ernst plays at Linz; it is a good town for music. It lies flat by the yellow Danube, with a fine

pink Kloster on a hill above it.

On this occasion, as usual, I accompanied my brother from Vienna. He played before a full and enthusiastic audience. I should not have had a seat but for the kindness of a critic, who gave up his seat to me when he discovered who I was; so that I sat in the second row, and could observe Ernst as easily as I could hear him. It was a Beethoven evening. I say no more. It would not become me to say that my brother is worthy of Beethoven, but I must confess it occurred to me several times in the course of the evening to hope that his immortal spirit — cured of its deafness — may have been hovering above the platform. The accompanist, a young Russian with fire in his fingers, was almost fit to play with Ernst. Fortunately he was musician enough to subordinate himself entirely to my brother.

It was a sonata evening. I think I prefer chamber music to any other. The music is, as it were, isolated, and in the hands of two skilled artists you get exactly what it means, neither more nor less by a shade! And what a blessing it is not to get more! Those artists who improve upon their composers, those instruments that forget their place in the orchestra, remembering their own identity, when like a good Buddhist they should exactly have no identity! How one resents such prac-

tices!

But with Ernst one need have no such fears. The passion is there, but the laws are those which form a

channel for the passion; the music runs pure and deep. He does not add to the last ounce of the composer's meaning some little extra of his own. He puts his fire into precision, and his personality into the depth of his tone. I say nothing about his tempo, or his bowing, because everyone knows they are as faultless as Andrea del Sarto's famous 'line.' It is a folly, that English saying, 'Genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains.' I do not say geniuses should not put the sweat of their brows into their work; but I say that the sweat of ordinary people's brows does not make genius. It has always interested me as a doctor to know that my brother's was a painless birth. All the rest of us cost my mother the usual price of women; but he, the largest and finest

of the lot, came without pain.

I do not often notice and

I do not often notice audiences, but on this occasion I was sharply aware of two people in the first row. One was a woman of the people, a stout woman, ignorant, and with a rapacious glance as if music could be made to rattle into a box like pennies. Once she actually let her programme rustle — a shocking thing almost unknown in a Viennese audience, but possible in the provinces. The other was a little girl with a large white-satin bow tied over one ear, and resting upon straight and not pleasing brown hair. She was a plain little girl with a cast in her eye; her face was like a tame white rabbit's. What struck me most about her was her stillness. She listened as if God spoke to her. Her spirit was not in her body at all; it hovered over the sweep of my brother's bow as if it would absorb the sounds that escaped even the finest ear. In one of the pauses I asked who these ill-assorted people were.

'The child is Clara Stillman,' my neighbour told me, '"ein Wunderkind." I am told your brother has consented to give an opinion upon her playing to-morrow. I have not heard her myself. She comes from rough

people. It is to be hoped she is a genius, since the poor child is certainly no beauty.'

The music continued. It was a good evening - not one of Ernst's best, but no one in the audience knew that, except myself. They called him before the curtain nine times, and several laurel wreaths with gold inscriptions were presented to him across the footlights. It is our custom in Austria to stand close to the stage for encores. The Wunderkind was nearly lost in the struggling crowd, but someone caught hold of her and lifted her onto the stage by my brother's side. Then they told him who she was, and he patted her shoulder kindly. The child looked up at him with her little blinking crooked eyes, behind window-panes, as we say. The look she gave him made me feel a little uncomfortable, it was so full of adoration; and as a father I have found excessive emotion bad for children. Little growing creatures should not be overpowered by too great a sensation. It is like pouring too hot a fluid into brittle glass.

My brother had been invited to take supper after the concert with the Music Director of Linz. There were to be several critics and people of importance to meet him. It was to be a grand affair. I saw him stoop and whisper something to the Herr Direktor, who nodded, and then my brother asked the mother of the Wunderkind if she might not come to supper with us. The mother consented, of course. It was as if the pennies she had seen in the music were changed to golden sovereigns. I did not like the look, at once so savage and so satisfied, that flashed into that woman's eyes.

It has not been my experience that life is very happy. It has its fine moments, and of its worst one can always say that they will end; but never have I seen such joy as there was on the face of the little Wunderkind. She looked quite beautiful as she sat between us in a little carriage I had been forced to order for the sake of the

violin. She put her hand on its cover and stroked it as if it were alive. 'See that the little one eats well!' said my brother kindly as we entered the café, where a private room had been arranged for us, 'for she looks half starved!' Then he took his seat by the Herr Direktor's wife at the head of the table, and I placed the Wunderkind by me at the foot. She could see my brother from where she sat, and she never took her eyes from his face. Once she whispered to me, 'He is the greatest violinist in the world, isn't he?' and I must admit that I humoured the child as far as to say, 'It would be hard to find a better!'

'Im-possible,' she answered softly.

We did not talk. Great happiness should be respected as great grief is respected. One should leave alone those who are experiencing these emotions. But I felt that I, too, perhaps might gather in silence the dreams that filled the mind of the little Wunderkind. For when I was young, before I had a wife and children to support. I also dreamed. I knew that she was hearing music, over and over again, those difficult, deep melodies of Beethoven that do not run lightly in the mind, but plough their slow way through the heart by the hard-cut channels of the intellect. I suspect, too, that she saw herself standing upon great platforms covered with light and flowers, hearing, as my brother had heard, the thunder of applause, and feeling in herself the magic of a great power moving out toward her audience — greater than their applause. She was in her heaven - while we sat round her eating our good hot duck and drinking glasses full of foaming beer. Everyone was kind to her; for the first time in her life she was accepted as part of the world that lives in and for music. No one had heard her. but they all believed in her.

After they had drunk my brother's health, he looked down the long table and suddenly caught sight of the Wunderkind. He suggested that they should drink her health. 'I am only the Present,' he said with a goodnatured laugh, 'and the Present is soon over. Let us drink to the health and to the music — of the Future!' — and they all stood up and drank to the Wunderkind.

She put her hand in mine, and I could feel her vibrating as a string vibrates in a good instrument. 'It is too much!' she whispered. 'It is too much!' I thanked them for her, and then I took her home. I was rather horrified at the house I had to leave her in; but it wasn't a house to the eyes that looked for a shy, long moment into mine — it was a shifting, enchanted palace, full of dreams.

The next morning the rain came down in a grey sheet. Out of our window we saw nothing but the yellow, swollen river, and the half-drowned, sodden street. Everything looked as stale as last year's newspaper. My brother was in low spirits, as often happens after a great evening. He sent away his coffee three times and said, 'If this is coffee, give me tea!' and, 'If this is tea. give me coffee!' Also he wished to challenge one of his critics. I did not know whether or not to remind him of his appointment with the Wunderkind, but before I had made up my mind that vulgar, pushing mother brought her to our hotel, half an hour before the time. My brother was very much annoyed, but what could one do? There they stood and dripped on the mat, all nerves and waterproofs. They had to be put somewhere, and sooner or later the Wunderkind had to be heard.

The mother was bursting with pride and ambition; she was just clean, as people are clean who are clean for an occasion and have not the habit. Her mouth was greedy and her bright black eyes avaricious; and I knew that women with such eyes and such a mouth are invariably cruel at heart. One trembles when one thinks of anything sensitive being in their power.

Of course little Clara was frightened. Her eyes filled and emptied perpetually with tears, her hands were red, and when I uncovered her from her wet outer garments I could feel the thumping of her heart, like a bird which feels a human hand close over it. My brother, when he had got over his annoyance, was very kind to her. He sat in his armchair by the window, smoking a cigarette. The mother, who wouldn't stop talking, I put as far away from him as possible, on a short sofa by my side; and the child stood by the table with her violin, just opposite my brother.

'There!' said my brother, reassuringly. 'Now remember, nervousness is of no consequence. I can tell all about your powers whether you are nervous or not! I am nervous myself always. All good artists are. If they say otherwise they lie, or they are not good enough. Think only of the music — nothing else matters. Now

what are you prepared to play to me?'

'She knows everything — but everything!' her mother bounced off the sofa to declare. 'Here in my hand is her first programme. The gracious gentleman may assure himself! Please look at it, sir. Ask what you like! The child is a genius — it is all the same to her what she plays! It has all been made out, as you see, by her own teacher, for the first performance. We only await your kind pronouncement before bringing out the bills! Play, child, play! Don't keep him waiting! Gracious sir, she is but ten years old! Consider her youth, I implore you, and tell me, her mother, her best friend, who has starved herself to give her a chance, if she doesn't play like an angel from heaven!'

'I shall not consider anything but her playing,' said my brother, a little shortly. 'As for this programme, it is very advanced. I doubt if any child ten years old is equal to it, and any programme at all may be out of place. Now, my child, since you can play all these, begin with the Beethoven Minuet, and then we will take the first movement of the Mendelssohn Concerto. You, madame, have the kindness to resume your seat, and remain perfectly still.'

My brother's voice filled the room like thunder, but it did not make the Wunderkind more nervous: on the contrary, she seemed to draw from it some kind of sus-

tenance, for she began to play immediately.

You know that very merry, very delicate Minuet of Beethoven, which should be played with fingers as light as thistledown, and from a heart that is like a wandering youth's, touched with many fancies, before one woman fixes it? Well - poor child, her thick little fingers stumbled woodenly through it. I thought it would never end; each note fell dirgelike and pattering as the heavy raindrops blown against the glass. I feared an outburst from my brother - I saw the frown gathering upon his brow, and his fingers twitching; but he was strangely patient. The Minuet did not finish. You know its swift gallant end, as complete as a perfect simile? The child scrambled to the last note; and just stopped. Nothing was complete - except the awful silence of my brother.

The poor child was less nervous when she began the Mendelssohn Concerto. I thought at first this would be an improvement and make her tone firmer, but she had been too badly taught - she simply had no tone. She had only — ah, how I felt this! how I wondered if my brother could feel it half as deeply! — she had intensity. If the heart could turn the blood that feeds it into music and so die, she would have died so. I have often heard gifted people say that if you want to acquire a talent sufficiently you will succeed in your desire. Did the frog succeed in puffing itself out to the size of an ox? It burst its heart in the effort. One cannot do more than try to get out of one's skin. The Wunderkind was making this attempt all the time; and it was hideous.

When she stopped, my brother said nothing for a while. He is by nature not a patient man; and the mother began to talk in that hard, overpersuasive tone which I knew would most infuriate him. 'There, now! there, now!' she cried, jumping up and down on the sofa. 'What do you say to that, good gentleman? Wouldn't people pay money to hear it? I won't say I've never heard her play better. She is nervous, of course, playing before such a great master. But at ten years old! Such a fine noise as that! And the right notes and all! And the pains the child takes! Night and day always at it! I am not one of your soft mothers, but I will say that when I see her teacher knock her about blow after blow, my good sirs - sometimes I say to her, "Don't you know enough without a teacher? Do I pay for nothing but blows? I shall just send her to the rightabouts, teacher or no teacher!" But the little one always says, "No, Mother, no! Let her strike me - only let her go on teaching me too!""

The child never moved while her mother spoke. Her eyes were fixed on my brother's face. I think before he spoke she read her sentence there. I have often found that what it is vital for us to know we learn without teaching. Death deceives relations often, and doctors

sometimes, but the patient - never.

'The child plays with feeling,' my brother said at last slowly. 'If she had not been so execrably taught I could undertake better to say what talent she has. As it is now, my good woman, you deceive yourself. She plays all wrong! No one would pay a krone to listen to her! She has neither tone nor tempo; her fingers are like pellets of dough; her bow is like a stick scratching a dog! Her mind, I can see, is in her work. It is not her fault that she has been given nothing to work on. But I cannot truly say that she has talent! In order to find out, she would have to unlearn all that she knows now, and

begin at the beginning with an honest teacher; then

after two or three years I could judge better.'

The vulgar fury of the woman burst through her fear of offending my brother. 'Two or three years!' she cried indignantly. 'Haven't I paid enough for the child's lessons as it is? What, do you think I'm made of money? I expected a return! And what her father will say, if what you tell me is true - and not mere dirty jealousy on your part - God knows! He'll beat the child black and blue probably - and no wonder! Poor honest working-folk like ourselves taken in like this for nothing! I'll tell that teacher what I think of her! I'll scratch her eves out the first time I see her! Now, Clara, none of that silly snivelling! I've often told you I treated you far too well. Letting you practise, practise for hours, till it made my teeth ache, when you ought to have been at some decent work. Yes, I've properly spoiled you, my child! But I shan't do so any more. It's not likely, is it. keeping the food out of my own mouth to give you a chance to earn bread, and all for nothing! I'm to be told by this fine, great, generous gentleman that you can't earn a krone!

The enraged woman pulled the poor sobbing child toward the door, but my brother swept the Wunderkind out of her grasp. 'Take that woman downstairs before I strangle her!' he thundered at me.

The door shut behind us, but before it shut I heard the Wunderkind's voice: 'Oh, if I can only go on play-

ing!'

Of course I don't suppose for a moment that she did. My brother told me afterward what he had said to the child. He had given her the address of a useful teacher, one of his own old pupils in Linz, and promised to arrange with the lady the easiest price possible for lessons. More than this, he intended to pay part of this price himself, for he had determined to give the poor child all the chance

there was. But the child kept on sobbing — I doubt if she even heard what he said. You see she knew what everyone else didn't — that she had no chance.

When I left the mother downstairs, slightly mollified by a ham-bread and a glass of beer, I found the child on the landing outside my brother's closed door, crying without a sound. I took both her hands in mine and I murmured into her ear: 'Little Wunderkind, I am like you! I have loved music all my life, but I could never be a musician. There is nothing in the world so good, so beautiful, as music, and no one can take this away from us! The greatest master in the world can only love his music well, and even he perhaps not quite so well as you — or I!' She stopped crying. 'Ah,' she whispered, 'do you think he understands — can you make him — that I knew? I didn't at first; in my mind it sounded so — so beautiful! But when I heard it in the room, after his playing, I knew it would never be anything at all.'

I promised her very earnestly that I would make my brother understand. She had everything about an artist except expression — even an artist's cruel veracity; and before I had finished promising, the child heard her mother calling, pulled her little hand out of mine, and

fled downstairs.

I watched the two figures as they left the door and passed into the street—the stout, flurried, angry woman, and the tiny, disheartened girl plodding home in the rain. I said to myself that we had witnessed two tragedies that morning—the tragedy of disappointed avarice and the tragedy of disappointed art; and of the two tragedies perhaps the first was that for which there is the least compensation. If you love money, nothing but the possession of money gives you any satisfaction; but if you love beauty, even if you cannot possess beauty yourself, yet she is always there—and she is always beautiful.









THE NAPKIN

Bertram Lapsely made up his mind very early in life, that what he wanted was the best of everything. His only doubt lay in how to acquire it. He knew that he was handicapped by being neither rich nor beautiful. Nor did he possess more than the normal faculties of a semi-educated man. But if his wits were not of the highest order, he kept them at his finger-tips.

His birth was mediocre; his father was a clergyman, his mother a squire's daughter. He had a very long upper lip, a largish yellow face, dark hair with a kink in it, and good manners. As he had nothing else to cultivate, he cultivated a very fine soprano voice and, when he was eighteen, it changed into a powerful and melting tenor. It was suitable for opera, perhaps even for the great rôles, but not without five years' thorough training.

Bertram felt that he must go to Oxford first and be an artist afterwards. He had to use all the money his father and mother could spare, and then he had to use all the money that he knew they couldn't; after this he borrowed from his friends.

For two years after he left Oxford, Bertram studied abroad. He cut himself adrift from all the pomps and vanities of the world; he thought them worth two years' complete privation; but he kept up his friendships. Bertram had always had rich friends; because when he was quite a child he realised that when you went to stay with rich boys they gave you chicken and méringues for lunch; and when you went to stay with poor boys you had only boiled mutton and rice pudding.

A man can be very popular on smart clothes, a carefree manner, and a few good jokes. Bertram had learned the patter of the class he wanted to join, and he took trouble to know the names of the clubs, tailors, and relations of all those he chose for his friends. He danced well and could talk to any woman if she were worth while, and could make her feel uncomfortable at once if she were not. He thought it important to be pleasant, but he knew perfectly well how to be unpleasant; he was quite an adept at making a silence awkward while he avoided any of the awkwardness adhering to himself. Bertram played a very sure hand at bridge, won modestly, and lost without annoyance.

His immediate aim was to make a good solid marriage, keep his world, and sing like Chaliapine. Unfortunately he had a taste for pretty and virtuous women, and before either of his main purposes was consolidated, he fell

in love with Milly Upton.

Milly Upton was a dear little fluffy blonde; she was nobody in particular and hadn't a penny to her name. Nevertheless there were points about Milly which explained Bertram's passion. She was a useful wife for an ambitious man. To begin with, she looked a fool, and wasn't. Her eyes were very large and blue, and had that absence of direct intent which is often mistaken for innocence. Milly could make a very little go a long way, and she could make nothing at all go some distance. Her complexion was faultless, and being rather yellowish himself, Bertram valued a pink-and-white skin in women.

Milly had alluring dimples and her disposition was as cheerful as her dimples. Her hands and feet were small and her legs enchanting. Her clothes had 'Paris' written all over them and were made by Milly herself in a back sitting-room. She was as nice to other women as she was to men; in public she was even nicer. All men liked her. She entertained them when she saw they were incapable of entertaining her; but not otherwise.

Bertram's heart was at Milly's feet; but his head wasn't; he still hoped he would not have to marry Milly. They danced and danced together. He took her on the

river and kissed her. He looked deep into her unexacting eyes, and sang his soul out to her; but he didn't propose marriage. Milly took the dances, the kisses, the

songs, and his eyes, very simply and naturally.

But after a time Bertram found that it was increasingly difficult to meet Milly. When she saw him, everything was just the same; she didn't try to lead him on or fend him off. Her peachlike cheeks flushed, her ravishing blue eyes sparkled; but either there was someone else there or Milly herself wasn't. Slowly Bertram began to realise that he would either have to ask Milly to marry him or go without Milly. The generosity of youth spurred him on. He proposed and Milly accepted him.

They had a great deal in common, for Milly wanted the Best of Everything too, and knew very nearly as well as Bertram how to get it. As she was a woman her processes differed slightly from Bertram's. Milly found it paid better to be agreeable to everybody, and not to notice when she was being snubbed. She listened and listened, read in snatches, made a passable fourth at bridge, and was known to be perfectly safe with husbands and exceed-

ingly useful to wives.

If she borrowed from men at all, it was only the smallest of sums which she paid back meticulously. 'A straighter little woman never lived!' was her club reputation. She borrowed rather more largely from her women friends, for whom she did imperceptible good turns afterwards. They always said that money wasn't everything and that it would be a shame to bother dear Milly to return what they could so easily spare. There was no doubt that Milly was really good in the only sense in which Bertram exacted goodness from women.

'What we want,' he said to her on their honeymoon, 'is enough money for clothes and taxis. We can stay with people till I get a job; it won't be too difficult finding one, with the right people's help. The two languages

I learned for opera will come in useful for business. My bridge will bring in enough for clothes. If we have children — and they are rather darlings — my mother can look after them.'

'I should adore two babies,' said Milly with dreamy eyes, 'a boy and a girl — just like us. My mother could look after them too — sometimes. But shouldn't we have to entertain back?'

'No,' said Bertram, 'my voice and your looks will do instead. You'll see it will all work out beautifully. We must avoid a very fast set, or the men would make love to you, and not have enough money to borrow from, either.'

Milly nodded her fluffy golden head. 'But your voice,' she asked; 'won't you mind, darling, not being a professional singer?'

Bertram got up and looked out of the window. They were staying in a friend's bungalow on the Thames, lent to them for their honeymoon. Beneath the window there

was a pergola of small pink roses.

Bertram felt oddly like 'Louise' when she stands on her lover's balcony at Montmartre having given up industry and a respectable home — for love and roses. He hummed the tenor aria of the second act and wished that his friend had had the sense to tune the piano.

'Of course,' he said gravely, 'I could still get a job with my voice, instead of something in the City. But for the big rôles I need two years' more training. If I —

if you — life's so damned expensive!'

Milly jumped up and ran to him, leaning her golden head against his arm. 'But you couldn't get a really well-paid regular job — just singing, could you, dearest?' she asked softly. 'Not something safe and splendid that would cover babies — not for years and years?'

'No,' Bertram agreed. 'We'd have to wait a hell of a long time, with nothing at all to show for it — and even

then once you're a real artist, you can't keep up a life outside your art.'

He felt as if he was smothering something that was alive for the sake of something that wasn't; and yet he knew he was only being reasonable. A sore throat might bring disaster upon the golden head leaning against his shoulder, not to speak of the babies!

'Some day,' Milly said, more softly still, 'you'll be knighted, I think; people in the City so often are, aren't they? And we might have one of the nice little bird-

cagey houses overlooking the Park?'

'It's a dog's life, an artist's,' said Bertram reflectively.
And then he went downstairs and tried the piano. He found it was not so much out of tune as he had fancied.

Bertram and Milly rose on the gathered wave of their popularity exactly as they had planned. They had almost too many invitations, but they all fitted in beautifully; and at the end of the first year a baby boy arrived, at a friend's house. The doctor, who was a charming man, never sent in any bill at all, and the trained nurse was paid for by an aunt.

Bertram found exactly the right job in the City. It wouldn't run to more than a small unfurnished flat in the right part of London, and when the second baby came, a rather delicate little girl, it was decided that the children should live altogether in the country with Ber-

tram's people.

The Lapselys had to keep only one servant, as they nearly always went out to meals, and Bertram sang quite magnificently in return for dinners, although he

had no time for practising.

It was true that clothes and taxis, with the rent in addition, cost rather more than the thousand a year which Bertram was earning; but perhaps he would earn more later, and Milly had been a perfect Jew about the furniture. Her flat was furnished in the newest, wild-

est style with colours that would crack a skull and shapes to startle a spider; and yet it cost really nothing — the few pieces of good furniture which had not been given them had been picked up by the frugal Milly for an old song. Friends with nurseries in the country often invited the children to meet their parents for week-ends. They knew how Milly and Bertram adored their babies.

Bertram and Milly were welcome everywhere, but particularly at foreign embassies because their languages were so good and foreigners so often appreciate music.

One night at a foreign embassy, Bertram had rather a disagreeable experience; his own tact saved it from becoming a disaster. He had picked up a half-starved Russian musician to play his accompaniments. Bertram loved doing good turns to musicians, and Maxime Daroffski he instantly knew was a rare artist. The Embassy would be more than a good turn for him, it might make his career. Bertram believed that when Daroffski had played Beethoven in public, his way would be cleared for him; and after he had played Bertram's accompaniments it was arranged that Daroffski should play Beethoven.

When dinner was over, Maxime Daroffski sat down at the piano and played a few preliminary chords. He took his hands off the piano with a gesture as abrupt as the flight of a startled bird. He looked around at Ber-

tram and said: 'My dear - the pedal creaks!'

Bertram said hurriedly: 'Yes! Yes! I know, but nothing can be done about it! Try to use it as little as possible!'

Maxime Daroffski stared at him as if Bertram had said something incomprehensible. 'Mon cher!' he repeated in a louder voice, 'I tell you — the pedal *creaks!*' He pressed it down hard; and it did creak.

'For God's sake — play!' Bertram said crossly. 'They

are all waiting!'

'Play? Oh, no!' said Maxime with great composure,

'never in the world; on a piano the pedal of which creaks? You are making a funny! Is there no other piano?'

The Ambassador approached them. His eyebrows were pressed rigidly together and he spoke in a tone of controlled exasperation which ambassadors should never be called upon to use. His air of astonished security was in itself a reproach.

'Is anything the matter?' he demanded.

Bertram shrugged his shoulders helplessly. He saw in a flash that the only thing to do was to abandon Maxime. 'As far as I am concerned,' he said, 'nothing!' There was a member of the Royal Family present, but even if there had not been, Bertram knew that he would have abandoned Maxime.

Maxime looked at Bertram, not at the Ambassador. 'I will play for your songs then,' he said slowly, 'if you like. You know how they will sound? But that is your affair! My own music — never!'

'But I beg of you to tell me,' said the Ambassador, addressing Maxime directly, 'what is the matter?'

'The matter,' said Maxime brusquely, once more exposing the disconcerting whine of the pressed pedal, 'is that the pedal creaks! Your Excellency, it is impossible for me to play upon this piano! Also it will utterly destroy the songs of Mr. Lapsely.'

'I can manage perfectly,' said Bertram stonily.

The Ambassador smiled and patted Bertram affectionately on the shoulder.

Maxime did not look at either of them again. He played one after the other the songs required of him. Then he got up and left the piano. Bertram forced himself to follow him.

'My dear fellow,' he urged, 'play! play! I beseech you! You are throwing away the chance of a lifetime — and for what? Who knows the difference here, between a good piano and a bad?'

'For what?' demanded Maxime incredulously; 'you ask me that? I ruin my career — if I have to — for one thing only — for the thing that is in myself — Music! And who knows the difference? I know the difference! And it is I who matter — to myself!' And with the horrible arrogance of this assumption the young Russian went out into the predatory darkness of the London night; and Bertram Lapsely found himself envying him.

Everyone applauded Bertram for his songs and the Ambassador told him that he would not forget his tact.

The circle in which the Lapselys moved was the best in London. It was fast too, because the best circles are always rather fast; but it was not wildly or exclusively fast. Still Bertram sometimes wished that he was not so fastidious. He didn't like to see other men kiss Milly.

Nor did Milly like being kissed. She said so; but she said as well that if you were too particular men didn't like it; and then, of course, it made it awkward when they were so kind about taking one out to theatres and lending one their cars. It happened, Milly explained, as little as possible — still it did happen.

Another thing that Bertram didn't like was the overpowering kindness of his senior partner, Leonard Barton. He showered presents on Milly, sent round his car several times a week for her exclusive use, and offered them week-end cottages, trips on yachts, and every form of

luxury and convenience.

One evening when Bertram came in unexpectedly early from a bridge party, he found Leonard Barton in the flat with his arm around Milly's waist. There was a thunderstorm going on at the time, and Leonard explained that Milly was afraid of thunder. Milly explained nothing, but she looked white and queer, and Bertram wished that she had not been dressed in plumcoloured pyjamas. They had a cocktail all round and parted most pleasantly.

Bertram waited till the door was shut on Leonard, then he said: 'Milly, you know I don't like this!'

Milly bowed her pretty golden head.

'It can't go on!' said Bertram, clearing his throat. Milly lifted her head and looked at him curiously.

'What are you going to do about it?' she asked; 'you know quite well what will happen if you stop it now, don't you?'

'You mean we should have the deuce of a row?' stammered Bertram, 'and he might get rid of me? But, Milly,

surely it could be managed with a little tact?'

'No, it couldn't,' said Milly inexorably; 'either he'll chuck you — or I've got to let him take me — now you know!'

Bertram walked up and down the brilliant scarlet-andgreen room between the tall standing lamps shaped like flying dragons. It did not feel like a home. Neither of them spoke for a little while; perhaps they were remembering their babies in the country; and what an additional expense children are when they grow up.

'I'm awfully out of practice now,' Bertram said at last in a low voice; 'I suppose you know my voice has gone to pot? Any question of an operatic career is over;

I'm too old to train.'

'It sounds all right,' Milly said rather sulkily; 'people

like it just the same!'

'Ignorant people do,' agreed Bertram, 'after dinner when it's all pretty and cosy. I can't sing in tune without practice and my higher notes have gone. I've lived too well.'

'That's not my fault!' said Milly sharply.

Bertram looked at her and shivered. In all their married life he had never heard the sharp scorn of that note. Her dimples too had disappeared.

Wasn't it her fault? Naturally he wanted to think so. Would he have stuck to his voice if there had been

no Milly — no babies? Or would he have simply given it up for something else a little easier? Some other Milly? Some less exacting dream?

He looked at Milly and then looked away again. Even if it wasn't her fault, he knew that he would never for-

give her.

'I might,' he said reflectively after a long pause, 'try

for another job in the City, Milly?'

'After Leonard has chucked you?' she asked scornfully. 'That's just it! You're not particularly clever about making money, Bertram! If you were they'd keep you — without bothering me!'

He knew where she had got that idea from; but he knew something worse even than the source of her knowledge. He knew that what she said was true.

'God in Heaven!' he cried explosively, 'do you want

to become this man's mistress?'

If she did that was one way out of it, and for a moment Bertram sank to the degradation of wishing that she wanted it. But his fastidiousness had not misled him. Milly was a virtuous woman; and she did not want to be anyone's mistress. She only saw with a clearness more ruthless than his own, the difference between buttered and unbuttered bread.

'No, I don't!' she cried with exasperation, 'I'd hate it! But what else can I do? We've got to go on living like this — somehow, I suppose?'

'Would you like to live in any other way?' Bertram

asked, a little dubiously.

He saw himself an organist in a country town, training a cathedral choir, and giving singing lessons. With luck, and with the influence they could wield, he could no doubt earn five hundred a year. They spent more than that between them on their clothes.

He found himself wondering not only if Milly loved him enough to make such a sacrifice, but, even supposing that she did, if he cared enough for her virtue to

pay such an abominable price for it?

Before he had time to answer either of these questions, Milly spoke again. 'He'll give you a job worth five thousand a year — if I do,' she said in a low voice, 'an awfully secure lifer kind of job. He was just talking about it when you came in.'

'And what did you say?' demanded Bertram, looking

down at the carpet.

'First I said "No," said Milly; 'and then I wondered. I wondered what you wanted *most*, Bertram, and I said I'd find out somehow if you wouldn't rather go back to a musical career!

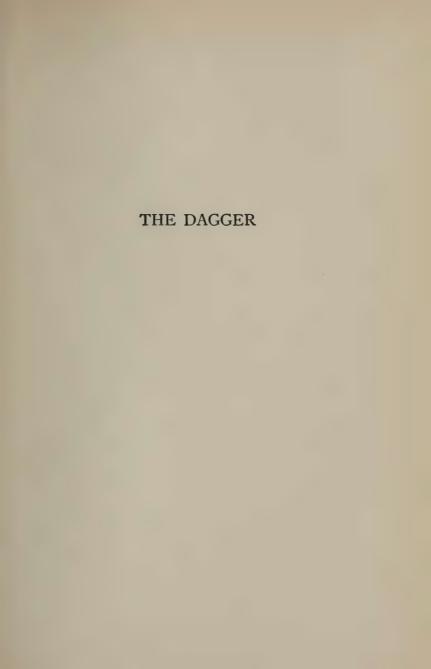
He wished she hadn't used the word 'rather.' It caught him between the ribs like the thrust of a knife. He raised his eyes to hers and they looked at each other steadily for a long while.

Then Bertram said slowly, with long pauses between the words, like a tired swimmer buffeted by rows of on-

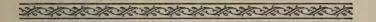
coming waves:

'That would have been — all right, Mill — old girl — if I had — any music left.'









THE DAGGER

It was Helena's own dagger. Her cousin Runch had sent it to her for a Christmas present. It had killed a man. All around its dull leather sheath were strewn bonbon boxes and Christmas roses.

To-morrow Helena was being sent back to the Kloster of Novwy Saçz, where there would be nothing but nuns and girls; and she would be, her mother said with a sigh of relief, safe.

Not even her mother understood that at fourteen safety is a thing one can very well do without. Helena had been brought up on the fire and tears of Polish history. When she said the word 'Poland' she blushed as if it had been a lover's name, and two little sparks of flame sprang within the soft blue of her eyes.

She could ride any of her father's fifty horses at any of their paces. But this was the first time she had possessed

a real weapon.

She was going to take it with her to the Kloster tomorrow, but not visibly. Because a dagger is not included in the list of things required by the nuns for the use of their charges.

It is not easy to dispose of a twelve-inch dagger upon a slim, young person underneath close-fitting garments. For several hours, while Helena was supposed to be asleep, she was busy making these complicated experiments. As a lesson in natural history the hiding of a dagger may be a success, but it can only be recommended to the brave and the persevering. In the end Helena accomplished her design, but she had to give up moving suddenly, and when she reached Novwy Saçz, the Reverend Mother was much gratified to observe the care with which Helena rose and sat down.

Helena was very happy at the Kloster. She was proud

of its massive four wings with their open loggias, and she loved the chapel in the centre, around which the hearts and thoughts of the nuns moved ceaselessly.

Every stone of the old palace was steeped in history. A vast park, full of avenues of limes, chestnuts, and slim, white birches stretched about its stately walls. You could walk for versts and versts and never leave Novwy Saçz, and your only company would be the solitary crucifixes watching over endless snow.

Outside the park gates flowed the empty plain, as featureless and impressive as the sea. Far, far away, where the blue cap of the sky fitted down upon the edge of the plain, were little stumpy hills covered with pine forests. The air smelt fine and fragrant, as if it had never been used.

There was hardly any sound except the innocent young laughter of nuns and children, or their crisp, light footsteps on the snow.

A very little way off silence began: you could go on into it, and all that happened was that the silence grew deeper. It grew so deep at last that the human heart fell asleep in it, and what touched it afterwards was like a dream.

The nearest village was nothing but a tiny row of wooden huts thatched with straw, and the nearest town was swallowed up hastily in a long wave of the plain. The town was only visible when you were already in it, and lost as soon as the last house was left behind.

It was the winter of 1921. Poland, having already fought for five years, fought on for two more. Across her torn and tortured land the Red and White armies laid the lash of their passionate antagonisms.

In the Kloster they heard whispers of these things. They heard of the Bolsheviks. Not as far-away monsters across distant frontiers, but as a menace to their own homes. It was all the difference between being told that

wolves exist and suddenly hearing, not very far off, their wild, harsh call for blood.

The Sisters, like their charges, belonged to the nobility; and although they knew that God was taking care of everything — especially of the old régime — they could not be quite silent under the pressure of imminent danger. They prayed to be delivered from the Bolsheviks; and perhaps they talked a little.

Certainly Helena knew that not a hundred miles away women and girls of twelve had joined the White Army.

War cannot be hidden from children who eat grit soup and black bread for breakfast, baked grits and turnips for dinner, black bread and grits, with a very little jam on them, before they go swollen and hungry to bed.

At the end of her first week at the Kloster, Helena decided to share her secret. She wore the dagger by day and kept it under her pillow at night. The joy of it had ceased to be so intense and the discomfort was persistent. Helena had reached the stage when the presence of an audience enhances the joy of possession.

Irene Makowska was Helena's confidante, and Maria had to be told because Maria was Irene's younger sister and could not be left out.

Irene's temperament was different from Helena's, but she shared Helena's tastes. She had dark, smooth hair with coppery gleams in it, an audacious, turned-up nose, a very short upper lip, and a gay, provocative, curling, twisting, heartrending mouth.

Irene did not look sternly practical, but she was. She had a cautious, prompt, far-seeing mind, no nerves, and an unswerving will. She lacked Helena's fierce *élan*, but she made a maryellous second.

Maria was clinging and obedient. She could follow wherever she was led, if the will obliging her to follow was sufficiently strong. She preferred not to be led into anything very awful, but she often was led into very awful things by Helena and Irene. All three children were very devout. Helena and Irene used God systematically as a stalking-horse for their intentions, and Maria clung persistently for support, physical and moral to all the Hosts of Heaven.

Helena showed Irene the dagger in their dormitory at a forbidden hour. They had been sent to bed for a misdemeanour. Maria, who was searching for a mislaid pocket handkerchief, came upon them unawares. On the bed lay the dagger — naked, polished, and repellent. Helena caressed the fierce, passive weapon with ardent finger-tips.

'See,' she explained proudly, 'it has killed a man!'

Irene, too, bent over it lovingly.

'What are you going to do with it?' she demanded. Helena hesitated. A deep flood of rose-colour spread

over her face to the roots of her fine golden hair.

'They are sending children!' she whispered. 'Children of twelve, against the Bolsheviks; and, oh, Irene, we are safe! Think of it! We, the daughters of Polish noblemen, are living idle—idle and safe in a Kloster—while our race, our caste, is being destroyed! At our age there is so little time to lose! I am fourteen and you are already fifteen. Maria herself is thirteen—and tall for her years; and we have a dagger! We can use it by turns. In the newspapers it says: "These children are often weaponless except for sticks and staves."

'What are staves?' asked Maria, who felt that this

was a case to be attacked by the indirect method.

'They aren't as good as daggers,' said Helena impatiently. She didn't know what staves were, either, but she had no intention of being caught out by Maria at this stage of the game. 'We must escape by night,' she added, rocking herself excitedly to and fro on the foot of the bed. 'Oh, Irene, say you'll come?'

Irene continued to look thoughtfully at the dagger,

but she did not speak.

'It'll be dreadfully cold,' urged Maria.

'We can each take our blankets from our beds,' Helena explained. 'It is a requisition. Fortunately they are soldiers' blankets. Poland must pay for them.'

'We can't get out at night,' Maria reminded them with relief. 'Everything will be locked up and the windows barred. We should be caught at once if we tried to escape by day.'

Irene spoke at last. Her silence was not due to any uncertainty about her intention; she had merely been considering the best means for carrying this intention out.

'It will be possible,' she said in that tone of calm finality which Maria most dreaded and which Helena found most soothing. 'We must steal some bread the night before, when it has been prepared for breakfast and left in the refectory. The portress's key must be taken on the way to chapel. Helena is the tallest, her veil can get disarranged, and she can stay to put it right, and take the key off the wall. But that must be done a week before we go, because the key will be missed and it will take a few days for the nuns to get over the fright of having lost it.'

'Oh, must we wait a week?' Helena moaned with anguish.

A faint light glimmered in Maria's mind; much might happen in a week; she herself might develop the courage necessary to reveal their plans to the Sister-in-charge.

'There are the passports to see to,' said Irene. 'They must be very carefully altered. It is fortunate that Sister Monica permitted me, as a good-conduct reward, to learn illuminating. I have tracing paper, and if I have plenty of time, I can, I think, change the letters in each of our names and the figures of our ages, so that no one can discover they have been tampered with. Maria need do nothing; she can even forget that she saw the dagger. But, Maria'—Irene's dreamy voice hardened sud-

denly to the consistency of steel—'if you dare to tell anyone our plans, or interfere with us in any way, you'll live to be sorry! Don't forget I'm your sister. I shall be your sister for the rest of your life. No one can protect you from my vengeance for long; and I give you my word, it will be very sure!'

Maria knew that it would; she gave up the hope of confession from that hour; but she didn't see why she

should go too, and she said so.

'Nonsense,' said Irene. 'Of course, you must come with us. You would be so frightened if I was not there that you would let out all our plans directly Sister questioned you. Besides, do you not wish to fight the Bolsheviks?'

Maria did not think that she did, but it would have taken a much braver girl than Maria to make this assertion, standing opposite Irene's steady, probing, dark eyes, and the wild blue flames of the enraptured Helena.

'But, of course, she wishes to fight them,' said Helena kindly. 'It is a dishonour to her to suggest otherwise. Why, she is the age of Basia in Sienkiewicz's Trilogy! You remember how many men she killed? She was thirteen when the first fell dead at her feet.'

'We may have to kill ourselves, of course,' said Irene thoughtfully. 'I believe that is more difficult. If it should be necessary — and, you understand, no Polish girl must fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks alive! — I will kill Maria; Helena, you must kill me. You are naturally quick. Can you fall on the dagger yourself afterwards?'

Helena looked perplexed.

'I've fallen on it heaps of times already,' she admitted. 'In its sheath, of course. It will get into places I can't stand having it in. I'm all over bruises — not that that matters, of course. I do know it better than either of you. But I wish there was time to get hold of some poison.'

'I don't think there is,' said Irene. 'The nuns don't keep it.'

Maria began to cry. Irene reproved her sharply, but Helena remarked reassuringly:

'She will be brave when she has to be. My father says even cowards shoot straight when a lion charges.'

Helena stole the front-door key on the way to evening chapel. She had to drop it down the neck of her dress, where, after an uneasy interval, it joined the dagger.

The Sister-in-charge gave Helena a disorder mark for restlessness during chapel; but it should have been a good-conduct mark for extreme self-control under sharp provocation.

The next day, the portress, white-faced and anxious, questioned them after breakfast as to the awful loss of the front-door key. It had most mysteriously and ominously vanished; gardeners, porters, nuns, novices, and postulants had all been questioned in vain.

'Dear children,' implored the portress earnestly, 'I beg you to examine your consciences, for if one of you has taken the key, it is a great sin, and for me a terrible calamity. I am responsible, and I shall be held responsible by Reverend Mother.'

This was a cruel complication. Helena was very honourable and she disliked intensely inflicting pain upon innocent persons in order to carry out noble actions. Irene was honourable, too, but she knew that innocent people who get in the way of great projects are generally more sharply punished than guilty people who keep out of the way.

Imperceptibly she shook her head:

'I know nothing about the key, Sister,' she said, with steady candour.

Helena repeated the statement, but her colour rose. Maria met Irene's eyes and came through the ordeal very creditably. She did not mind a lie as much as the drastic purposes which a lie is sometimes used to conceal.

It was a long, haunting, but successful week. When the night arrived, Helena had secreted three loaves at the foot of her bed, the key, and the dagger. Irene was in charge of three exquisitely forged passports, and had stolen the salad oil which was saved for Easter, and with a feather had oiled all the necessary locks. Maria was responsible for nothing but her fears. Time had blunted these, and she slept.

It was an icy January night; there were fifteen degrees of frost. The large dormitory was very cold, the wooden floor had gathered to itself the crackling quality of frost. Helena saw Irene's shadowy figure already clothing itself in a distant corner. She rose softly, but her very bed-clothes seemed to whisper as they fell away from her. The dagger barked her shins and then settled with a cold solidity against her thigh. The loaves she fastened neatly in a soldier's pack, made of the blanket. Round her neck she wore a locket with her dead brother's hair.

Irene woke Maria. She did it by putting her hands on Maria's shoulders, her lips against her ear; her dreadful will invaded Maria with the ruthlessness of a tide. Maria got up meekly and let Irene help her on with her clothes. Like a sheep before her shearers, she was dumb.

All around them slept the innocent and peaceful companions of their childhood. In a small room out of the dormitory one of the Sisters was supposed to sleep with her door open, and one ear at least ready to be roused by a whisper. But she heard no whisper. The high windows reflected the pale light of the snow. The three children struggled noiselessly into their clothes, their hearts turned into audible engines, their feet moving over the cold, creaking boards reminded them of avalanches.

Maria saw with horror that her boots were to be tied round her neck and that she was to start barefoot. But horror was as useless and as cold as everything else.

Helena already stood at the door. Irene took Maria's hand and led her through the long dormitory, between the rows of white and peaceful beds — each bed a hope turning to slow despair. Nobody moved, there were no gaps in the steady, placid breathings, no sudden 'What's the matter?' to make the awful matter cease.

The door closed soft as wool behind them. Helena flashed a torch lamp in front of them. They followed her dark, intrepid figure into a gulf of blackness. Down, down, down the interminable well of the stone staircase, into a most hideous place, as full of shadows as a forest is of trees. It was the unknown, unending hall, which

they used so familiarly every day.

At last they reached the great iron door of the Kloster. Irene took the latch in one hand and pushed her soft, firm fingers under it and above. Helena drew out the key and they leant their light weights against the door till it slowly yielded. They held their breaths while the echo of the audible creak trailed behind them down the long empty corridors, like the reverberation of a bell. Another moment and they stood outside on the threshold. The icy air struck their faces with the force of a blow. Maria's whole body winced at the sharp, freezing impact. Neither Helena nor Irene as much as sighed. They took Maria by the hand and plunged into the snow as if it were powdered sugar.

Everything was dim and silvery. They crossed the interminable sweep of lawn and turned down one of the long avenues of silver birches. The snow lay like feathers on the branches of the trees, and as far as the eye could reach the close white covering spread deep over the in-

visible earth.

There was no moon, but the stars, hard and sparkling as a thousand frost-flowers, pricked their way through the black veil of the night.

At the edge of the park they came to a brook of rush-

ing icy water. Helena waded across it first, holding the torch to guide them. Irene took Maria on her back and carried her over.

'She is only thirteen,' she exclaimed apologetically to Helena, when the breath came back to her.

Helena nodded.

'The first danger is over,' she said. 'The dogs haven't heard us. We can put on our boots now.'

They accomplished this agony in silence; then they marched single file, for the path was narrow, through an

endless expanse of field.

There was a faint wind, a mere breath that stirred the light hair on their foreheads, but penetrated with a dreadful icy chill through all their coverings. The wind made a secret hollow sound in the bare trees above them. as if Death had a voice and were whispering.

Maria shivered so that it seemed as if her body was dancing for fun. From time to time, when it was too dark to see their way. Helena flashed the torch onto the path, and Maria clung to the lovely little comforting

light in her soul, and prayed to it to save them.

The path turned between two high walls. On either side of it lay cemeteries. One was the old cemetery of the neighbourhood, filled peacefully through long years by normal deaths. The other was the swiftly filled and piteous cemetery of those who died by thousands out of their time, their course suddenly shattered in the temple of their youth, which should have been their refuge.

'Must we go through the cemeteries?' whispered Maria.

'Yes,' said Helena firmly; 'it is much shorter. We must go six versts to the second station; someone might recognise us on our own. Maria, don't be afraid! The dead who died for their country sleep sweetly. They said this of my brother Roman.'

'I said — I said,' cried Maria, tears, teeth, flesh, all crumbling into one cruel weakness together, 'I would fight against the Bolsheviks if you liked, but never — never against ghosts!'

'But there are no ghosts,' said Irene sternly. 'The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, there shall no torment touch them. Don't you remember?'

'But everybody isn't righteous! We aren't ourselves,'

moaned Maria, 'we stole bread!'

'So did Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, for that matter,' said Helena reassuringly, 'and the Virgin turned it into roses when she wanted to get out of its being bread. It's the cause that matters, not what you do to win it. Hark! Irene, what's that noise?'

In the crystal silence a far-off sound broke like a shot. It was a craving, mournful sound; even Helena felt her blood run chill.

Irene caught Maria into her arms. Maria wanted to faint, but couldn't; fortunately she choked.

The sound came again, but much nearer, much hoarser,

much more hungry.

'Pooh! It's only dogs!' explained Helena stoutly. 'Wild dogs; they come to the cemetery at night, poor things, because no one feeds them.'

Irene turned sharply to Helena.

'But what shall we do?' she gasped.

They dragged Maria to the wall, and stood in front of her. They had no time to think of anything else. Through the dim, silvery light a monstrous form dashed towards them, awful, with flaming eyes and wide, red mouth. There was a horrible fierce sound of gritting teeth; then another monster flew towards them, and another, all biting, snarling, tripping over each other.

Helena and Irene fought instinctively. They had no time for fear. They fought for their lives; and Irene, who had only a bough from a tree to defend her, fought for Maria. The dagger took first blood, a dog rolled over with a hideous cry; its fellows tossed themselves upon it

and began tearing at its still quivering flesh.

'Now!' cried Helena. They dragged Maria, with her eyes shut, out of the horrible circle. The awful sounds died down. The last of the white tombstones flickered past them; the three children were out once more on the open, endless, stainless snow.

Irene said suddenly:

'I thought I saw the Virgin standing in front of us with her cloak between us and the dogs. Did you see anything, Helena?'

'Yes,' said Helena briefly. 'I saw the dog's blood on

my dagger and I thought of my brother Roman.'

It was obvious that Maria had not thought of any-

thing. She sobbed in broken, breathless gasps.

'I want to go back!' she pleaded. 'I want to go back! I don't really hate the Bolsheviks as much as all this. I'm so cold; I couldn't fight, Helena, I couldn't really!'

'One gets warm fighting,' said Helena.

'If you go back,' said Irene sternly, 'you go back alone,

through those fighting dogs. We go on.'

Maria's sobs died suddenly away. Irene, although she had caused it, minded Maria's chilled silence more than the cold.

Far away across the snow a tiny light gleamed beneath

the light of the stars.

'We are nearly there,' said Helena. 'That is the station light. I will go first to find out when the train is due. We must separate. There is a wall behind the station, Irene. Perhaps you can find shelter there for Maria. I will come back as quickly as I can. God protect us!'

'Go, with God!' said Irene. She drew Maria under the wall, and, taking off her own blanket, wrapped it round the child's feet. Then she took Maria in her arms

and held her close.

Time stood still and became one with the cold and the silence. Then a shadowy figure leaned over them.

'The train is four hours late,' Helena murmured. 'Oh, Irene! We must stay here those four hours! It will not be safe for the three of us to be seen together in the station. Oh! I am afraid — afraid that they may find us after all!' For the moment it seemed as if, before this dreadful fear, Helena herself might break down.

'They will not miss us,' said Irene reassuringly, 'until six o'clock. If we are lucky, they may not see that we are not there before seven. What time is it now, Helena?'

'It is three o'clock,' said Helena.

'Nothing passes — not a freight train nor a single engine — before seven.'

Helena sank listlessly beside them in the snow.

'We must not go to sleep,' said Irene warningly.

Helena flung her discouragement from her. She sat up straight.

'I will tell you stories,' she said, 'stories of our family and from Sienkiewicz's novels; it is all the same! We Poles have always fought, from the ages to the ages!'

They sat there in the snow till the dawn glimmered faintly behind the night; and Helena told them stories. Her low, hoarse voice held them like a charm. She told them stories of brief love between the flickering of swords, light death under fiery dawns, and the swift and stirring Polish tragedies as wild and as quick as the Mazurka, and almost as gay. They swallowed up the interminable hours. Even Maria listened. No one slept. Once or twice Helena paused to listen for suspicious sounds, and once or twice towards morning the station telephone bell rattled and jerked in a sinister way into the station box.

'There is the train signal at last!' cried Helena. 'Watch the road, Irene! Maria, go into the waiting-room till you see me climb into the train, then follow. I will take the tickets. Irene, you come last. Oh, Heaven! To know that we are off!'

Maria tottered, forlorn, half blind with sleep, yearning for capture, but still obedient, into the waiting-room. Irene stood alone, her face to the wind, and scanned the glimmering, empty road.

Helena took the tickets. The telephone bell rang

madly again, like a furious woman in a panic.

A police officer sauntered along the platform and beckoned to Helena. Helena ignored him. He stepped forward and said: 'The little lady must say where she is from and where she is going?'

Helena's replies were prepared and clear, but undeniably haughty, and her eyes, frosty and determined, failed to remind the police officer of the peasantry to

which Helena claimed that she belonged.

The police officer moved nearer; he laid a sudden hand on her wrist.

'It is no use, young lady,' he said, not without a certain rough kindness. 'You have run away from the Novwy Saçz. Where are the two others?'

Maria tottered towards them, a willing victim.

'Let me go!' said Helena sternly to the police officer. 'The train is moving. You see for yourself that I cannot catch it. I wish to be alone.'

The police officer hesitated; then, shrugging his shoulders, he released her wrist. The train had gone. In the

wide plain around them no escape was possible.

Helena hardly looked to see if she was obeyed; hurriedly she ran behind the station, and with a swift, secret movement flung the portress's key over the wall. It sank deep into the soft snow; and with it sank half their consciousness of guilt.

Irene had seen the capture. She had already buried her own and Maria's loaf of bread in the snow. She now

took Helena's.

'They cannot punish us for stealing what we have not got,' she said in explanation, and she stamped the snow down tight over the loaves with her numbed feet.

Then they rejoined the police officer.

In an hour they found themselves driving swiftly through the familiar gates of Novwy Sacz. The sun was shining; the dark torrent they had waded in the night looked a friendly, shallow stream. The great door stood open. A band of terrified and infuriated nuns awaited them. Maria, who had collapsed completely, was promptly carried off to bed. Helena and Irene were taken into the hall of Convocation. The Mother Superior sat in her great chair awaiting them; around her sat the silenced nuns. The Mother Superior was a very terrible old lady; she had features which looked as if they were carved out of ancient ivory, and eyes which might have come out of the head of an eagle. Her voice was very low and never had to be raised in order to be formidable. Behind her, on the wall, hung a life-sized black-and-white crucifix.

Helena and Irene were half frozen and blue with exhaustion. Their clothes were in rags. Irene's left wrist hung limp from a dog's bite; Helena had a wound in her leg and another on her shoulder. Two of the nuns began to cry from pity.

'What,' asked the Reverend Mother, 'have you to say

for yourselves?'

Before her cold, old eyes their heated heroism seemed a poor affair.

'We went to fight the Bolsheviks,' said Helena in an uncertain voice. 'We didn't think you'd let us if we asked.'

'Ah,' said the Reverend Mother, with a faint twist of her old white lips. 'You had that much perception. My children, you are too young to fight against the Bolsheviks; nor should you fight devils with their own weapons. Disobedience and lawlessness are the qualities of the Bolsheviks; you have made them your own. You, Irene, may very probably have killed your younger sister. You, Helena, might have broken your sorrowing parents' hearts. They have no other child. Think of these things for your punishment. You will be placed in the lower rooms as prisoners for a fortnight.'

The Reverend Mother paused sufficiently long to bring their defeated scheme home to them. Then she

said, turning to Irene:

'Irene Makowska, do you admit that you have committed a disobedient and evil action?'

Irene admitted it.

'And you, Helena Bieluniecki,' the Reverend Mother continued with an even greater severity, 'you also, I hope, are prepared to admit that you have acted law-lessly and evilly? None of you knew how awful might have been the consequences of your rash action, but you knew that you were acting against the rule under which you were placed by your parents?'

Helena looked up suddenly; her fiery blue eyes met

and actually held those of the fierce old nun's.

'No,' she said firmly. 'Reverend Mother, if to fight for our country is a sin, then there can be no good Poles! I broke a rule because I felt something higher than a rule call me; and I shall break a rule again if I feel such a call!'

The Reverend Mother appeared suddenly and distressingly to have received the visitation of deafness. She said hastily to the twittering Sisters:

'Remove these girls. Feed them, rub them with hot towels, put them to bed, and incarcerate them. They are to have no communication with the outside world.'

They did not have at all a bad time downstairs. They received better food than usual. Once a day the Reverend Mother visited them. She said it was to convince

them of the enormity of their crime. But, strangely enough, she said nothing further about it; and when there were no nuns in attendance, there sometimes shone a most sympathetic twinkle in the Reverend Mother's eagle eyes. After all, she was herself one of the family of Polivonski, the most formidable family of all the fighting Poles.

Helena continued successfully to conceal the dagger. When she went home for the summer, she was ordered by the Mother Superior to tell her father the whole story.

Helena was afraid of her father. Since her brother Roman's death he had never smiled, and he thought disobedience the worst sin of which a woman can be guilty.

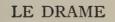
He listened to her story in stern silence, and when she had finished he said:

'Go and bring me the dagger.'

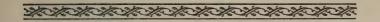
Helena thought that he was going to punish her by taking it away. She had grown very fond of her dagger, and she wore it now almost painlessly.

When she came back, Graf Bieluniecki bent down and kissed her forehead; and then he took the dagger out of her hand, and walked across the hall to the great open fireplace, above which the most famous of all the weapons of their family shone on the wall. Every weapon that hung there stood for some splendid deed. Bieluniecki hesitated for a moment, and then he hung the dagger under the sword of his dead son Roman.









LE DRAME

PAULINE had never known a moment's insecurity. For fifty years life had hovered over her, picturesque, risk-

less, without undue pressure.

It might have been said that she was born properly brought up. Her childhood contained no temptations (beyond those common to all children — to eat too many sweets, and occasionally to misunderstand the mysterious orders of authority).

She became a beautiful young girl, with hair as yellow as corn, and blue, wide eyes, with no notion in them but kindness. She was always inclined to rather a full figure, and moved slowly, as if she did not expect to be surprised.

When her friends wished to compare her to a goddess, they chose Juno, and not Aphrodite, for their comparison. Pauline would not have been likely to rise from the sea — she rose very seldom from anything. She was the queen of her small western town, and her royalty was accepted with equal placidity by both sexes. Women are never jealous of a woman who has no devil in her; mere outward attractions, position and money, arouse envy, but the fiercest of the passions is only excited when there is something in the object which shows fight.

Pauline took what was put into her hands, but she was incapable of snatching it. It was in this way that she accepted the best young man of the town, the one most favoured by fortune and most likely by personal effort to egg fortune on. When Pauline married Abner Proctor, she became the leading married woman, as she

had been the leading girl, of East Greenville.

Everything in her house was a little more plentiful and a little better handled than in anybody else's house. When Pauline said 'my house,' she meant the best place she had ever seen, and when she said 'my husband,' she meant the best man of her acquaintance. Pauline was not proud of these things, nor even patronising; but she had poise. Her husband was delighted with her, and, knowing that she was as good as gold, he took chivalrous pains to prevent her from discovering the existence of evil. This was easier than it would have been in Europe, or even in New York, for though the people in East Greenville sometimes did wrong things, they never said them. Beyond swear words they knew no conversational improprieties, and only the men used swear words.

When Abner was killed in a gigantic railway accident after ten smooth perfect years of married life, Pauline never even saw the body; the shock of his death by itself was nearly enough to kill her. She didn't make a fuss, she simply subsided into being an invalid for life; but as she was only thirty and perfectly strong, she began, after two years' complete breakdown, to get a little better, and people said, 'Pauline will take her old position, and

of course she'll marry again.'

Pauline did take her old position; she began entertaining, she gave perfectly appointed women's lunches, and became President of clubs and societies. She sat on Boards and opened meetings. She was more philanthropic than she used to be, though she never actually mixed with the objects of her philanthropy; but she didn't marry again. Perhaps she might have remarried if she hadn't had such good servants, such an excellent man of business, and an income which was either \$100,-000 a year or \$200,000 a year - she never could remember which. At least half a dozen men of perfect suitability asked her to marry them. Pauline thought the matter over on each occasion with a slightly fluttered heart, and the utmost consideration for the aspirant's feelings; wept a little, visited the enormous marble mausoleum dedicated to Abner, placed fresh violets on

the glass coffin, and on her return said 'No.' She was very sorry, but she couldn't bear to change her dear husband's name; it didn't seem to her as if Abner was any less her husband because of the mausoleum, and perhaps after twenty years, if he had returned, it would not have seemed to Pauline as if he were any more her husband.

Time's changes upon the most stubborn human hearts are imperceptible, and at the mercy of chance.

One of Pauline Proctor's principal interests was the stage. She was not an actress; that wouldn't have entered into her reflective mind, and it wouldn't have suited her type; but she arranged plays, chose them with skill, and even wrote them herself for amateur dramatic societies.

She had, strangely enough, without any particular use for it, a real gift for the theatre. She had the 'stage sense'; memorable moments presented themselves to her in effective spectacular scenes.

Pauline could have been trusted to arrange an historical pageant to perfection, if she had been allowed to leave out the crimes. Her plays were considered the best things East Greenville produced, the whole neighbourhood demanded them. She wrote very slowly, very carefully, and extremely well. Her humour was perhaps heavier than her pathos, and her situations, though they were excellently conceived, had about them a patness seldom achieved by life; but there was no real reason why the professional stage should not have produced Pauline's plays successfully, except that the idea had not occurred to Pauline, who did not want money, and would have disliked having to deal with stage managers.

The European war broke in upon Pauline's protracted girlhood with a shock as dynamic as the death of Abner. Pauline was never neutral about the war. Her honeymoon had been spent in Paris, and she saw the elusive

green and silver city as pilgrims see Mecca in their dreams. Paris was sacred to Abner and to happiness; the mere thought of a German near it defiled it, as the foot of a Christian defiles a mosque.

For four troubled, stimulating years Pauline involved herself in mufflers, bandages, and newspapers. She even disputed for the sake of France. It was the gentle Pauline who hounded one of her childhood's friends out of the Women's Reading Club as a pacifist, for daring to assert that she believed the Germans were no worse than any other people. She publicly rebuked her own minister for a fling at England. 'This is not the time,' she said sternly, 'to remember old animosities. It is enough for us that England is the ally of France, and no patriotic American should criticise her.'

Still she only thought of the war as it affected France, and of course poor suffering little Belgium (which unfortunately she and Abner had not had time to include in their honeymoon). The word 'Rheims' brought the blood to her cheeks, and she could not hear the 'Marseillaise' played without tears.

Pauline never doubted how the war would end. Without being obtrusively religious, she believed in God, and though she was aware that Providence sometimes overlooks private happiness, even united with virtue, she could not believe that Providence would fail human beings so obviously in the right, upon so large a scale.

The suggestion that she should go to Europe after the Armistice came upon her at one of the mild crises of her mild domestic affairs. She was about to lose her cook, and she knew that for a time she would be uncomfortable until she could get used to a new one. It seemed to Pauline as if a trip to Paris to see how it was recovering would be like an appropriate visit to a convalescent friend.

It took some decision on her part, and she lay awake

for several nights, half an hour later than usual. She had to consider the poignant memories of her honeymoon and the difficulties of travelling alone; but when her cousin suggested a courier maid, Pauline surmounted the question of her memories. After all, since it comforted her greatly to go every Sunday to Abner's mausoleum, why should she flinch from revisiting the outer shell of her honeymoon?

It was a late April evening when they arrived in Paris, the courier maid (who proved invaluable — she was French by extraction with a strong American superstructure) knew exactly where Mrs. Proctor would like

to go and what she wouldn't care to be told.

The weather was perfect, fresh and mild with a light like a Japanese print; not colour, so much as the reverberation of colour, rested upon the silvery roofs. The green swift river, the young buoyant trees were as vivid as sunshine. The Sacré Cœur blazed in the distance, white as the lilies of France. The Trocadero lifted its two plebeian pink towers with a grave insincerity of line. Everything that was distant looked near, and everything that was near was as distinct as if it had been carved upon the shimmering air.

The shrill, swift sounds of Paris broke upon Pauline's ears — sharp with memories. Only the Champs Élysées had changed. Its broad expanse, as bright as bayonets, was no longer given up to horses and carriages, jingling harness and tossing manes. Instead it was filled from end to end with motors, moving like travelling mercury — a perpetual procession of quicksilver, rapid and light as if each separate car was part of some gigantic ceaseless machine.

It is improbable, however, that Pauline observed this difference in the Champs Élysées, because she was perfectly used to motors by now, and was going to hire one of her own the next day.

Pauline settled very rapidly into the life she was accustomed to, with natural differences which gave her great pleasure. She spoke a smooth and excellent French, and Marcelle Butin took her to a good manicure shop where she could first have her hair beautifully waved, and then her pink nails polished as well (but not better) than they had been polished at home.

Since Abner's death Pauline had gone on dressing carefully, more from habit than from inspiration. One of her most cherished ideals was to be outwardly, as well as inwardly, exactly what Abner had liked, so that she had never yielded carelessly and sloppily to middle age. But there had been a faintness of spirit in her choice of clothes which revived in Paris.

Pauline was still a good-looking woman, pale, tall, with a slightly full figure, without a grey hair in her head; she looked like one with whom time has come to easy terms. She might have been forty, she might even have been thirty-five, so lightly and softly had the long slumbering years of her widowhood passed over her.

Pauline had always had a great many friends, and had never been long alone, and she found several of them lingering, as she was lingering, richly befriended by the settled American colony of Paris. She was rather glad there weren't any of her compatriots in her own hotel; she thought it made the atmosphere more French.

Pauline went to Worth, she went to Paquin, she went every Sunday to the American church; and twice to visit the battlefields and Rheims. She was as deeply moved as she could imagine anyone being, and gave away a great deal of money to help those who lived in the devastated districts.

She had not even begun to find time hang heavy on her hands when Marcelle Butin proposed a fresh diversion. 'Madame,' she observed, 'being so devoted to the drama, and so well known a playwriter in America, it would perhaps be an amusement for her to study "Le Drame" upon the spot which gave the theatre to the world? It is true Shakespeare was English, but he is a little banal nowadays, and probably always overrated by the English who have produced nothing since.'

Pauline hesitated because she had been told that French plays were rather odd, but Marcelle explained that against this there were always precautions which could be taken. She herself knew a most discreet and fascinating actor who would be glad to guide Madame safely through the devious pathways of 'Le Drame.'

Pauline listened with increasing interest, and finally decided to see M. Raoul Godaud and judge for herself

of his discretion.

She was conscious from their first meeting that their acquaintanceship was an event. She had never met anyone in the least like him. Raoul Godaud held his spare slight figure as erect as if he were leading a battalion; his short stiffly brushed hair and moustache had a distinguished silvery finish. He was neat, graceful, and active. From the crown of his compact, well-shaped head to his inflexibly tied shoes, he was complete. His brown eyes were at once watchful and lively, so that you felt that not even in his wildest moments would it be particularly easy to carry M. Godaud off his feet. His manner was delightful, like a crisp autumn morning, but it was not a manner that encouraged anyone to ask a favour from him.

M. Godaud knew his Paris as if he had made her, and if he had made her, she would have been in almost every respect precisely what she was, and not in the least like Pauline's Paris, which had never existed.

M. Godaud knew even more about the theatre than he knew about Paris, and he selected from the well-filled

stores of his knowledge exactly those facts which he thought would be suitable for Pauline to know.

At first M. Godaud made a few cautious attempts to pierce Pauline's delicate ignorance, but when he found how vast the field was and how virgin the soil, he let it alone. He saw that she was totally unaware of what formed the everyday structure of his own mind. He therefore closed the door on his conscience with a firm and practised hand, and said to himself, 'Here, my boy, you have before you the true "jeune fille." She has survived a marriage without implications — no doubt one of those trans-Atlantic unions which would be acceptable in heaven. One asks oneself, "what has she to do with Le Drame?" But since she is rich, it is

worth my while to find out.'

Godaud applied himself with tact and absorption to his discoveries. He was aware that he was moving about in a strange world, where the values were inverted by human beings who differed markedly from himself; but he did not think that any of his discoveries would be very dangerous. It surprised him to find that Pauline was widely read; that though, as she plainly told him, she liked pleasant books, she would put rubbish aside with placid firmness; and she knew how to write. M. Godaud was not accustomed to a mind that was without reserves, but he saw that Pauline had a simple, accurate style, which was at times even dramatic. That she also had a sense for the theatre was beyond a doubt, even if she had very little to put on the stage she knew instinctively how to put it on. These powers intrigued M. Godaud exceedingly. He liked to call daily at the big hotel, to whirl up in the lift to the small private sitting-room full of light and flowers. He liked to find Pauline awaiting him, beautifully dressed, with her shining hair, her careful manners, and her slight, girlish flush of pleasure at his entrance.

Pauline could not hide her sense of excitement at these quiet meetings. She did not talk about them to her friends. They knew vaguely that she was studying the drama with a French professor, but none of them were admitted on M. Godaud's afternoons — these mysterious hours shone in Pauline's mind like the golden islands of the Hesperides.

Pauline had had a great deal of masculine attention all her life, and she had taken it very simply, as she took having her motor at the door; but this attention of M. Godaud's seemed more masculine and more impressive than anything she had known before. It made her heart beat quickly and filled her mind with an odd exhila-

ration.

M. Godaud looked at her as if he was picking her out of a crowd with a discrimination as distinct as a warning. He treated her with a careful intensity which gave her the feeling that she was never out of his mind. He allowed neither the ease of familiarity, nor the comradeship of a common purpose, to shake the dangerous carefulness of his composed manner. She was the Image in the shrine and he the devout worshipper; still he required of her that she should not overlook his prayers.

Pauline did not overlook them; but in her pleasant flurry at their intensity and duration, she hardly knew

what any of them were about.

At their first interview she explained to M. Godaud that she wanted to study the French drama in order to blend it intellectually with the American. It was, she said, her intention (if M. Godaud was interested in the attempt) to write, with his collaboration, a play which would unite the purity and sentiment of the American stage with the brilliance and intensity of the French drama. M. Godaud bowed. He did not point out to Pauline that purity and intensity have not often been found upon the same spot. He merely said that he had

seldom heard of anything more striking. M. Godaud was a man of strict intellectual integrity, and he looked forward to this experiment with agony, but he intended to make Pauline pay him for his agony, and as he was very badly off he proposed that she should pay him a good deal.

Pauline first concocted a plot. She had a facility for plots which astonished M. Godaud, and while she accepted his criticisms with perfect docility, she frequently suggested excellent emendations of her own. Then she wrote a scenario, translated it into her accurate, child-like French, and set to work to write scene after scene, under his direction, translating as she went. Pauline worked very hard and accomplished wonders. M. Godaud took her scenes home with him and read them with amazement. He was astonished that Pauline could do so well what was so little worth doing. The substance of the drama is life, and Pauline knew nothing about life, but she managed everything else beautifully.

'This,' M. Godaud said to himself, 'is a drama of the nursery. Madame cannot be upon the track, or is it that in their enormous and unintelligible country they have no tracks — nothing but what one can only describe as

"l'esprit de couvent."

'One wants,' he explained to Pauline the next day, 'to make it a little more acute, this drama. Might I suggest, Madame, that in this third act, it is not the young lady to whom the hero was once betrothed who confronts his wife, but his former mistress? Otherwise one does not see what should cause such a meeting to be inconvenient?'

A peculiar and icy stillness crept into the small cheerful room. Pauline made no immediate answer; she seemed suddenly to have gone a long way off. Then she said quietly, but with complete finality:

'That would be quite impossible. I do not say, Mon-

sieur, that we never have plays about such questions in America, but they will not be written by me.'

M. Godaud did not apologise. He saved himself by an effort from a second indiscretion, and passed on to

another and more innocuous point.

Pauline was instantly human again, and as the days slipped by she became more and more human. She drove with M. Godaud in the Bois, and on hot evenings she asked him to stay to dinner, and went out with him afterwards, into the changing blue and silver streets. She wore gayer and more audacious clothes, the look in her face of a girlhood, never far withdrawn, returned more and more often. Pauline had not forgotten Abner, but she had forgotten that she had spent her honeymoon in Paris.

They had nearly finished the play and M. Godaud had changed his mind about it. It was, of course, from one point of view, what he had expected, the flat revelation of ignorance; but it was done extraordinarily well—it even carried with it a certain conviction. Might it not

be the triumph of ignorance over experience?

In a country given up to its own natural buoyancy, and avoiding so skilfully the challenge of facts, perhaps a play so prettily evasive, so dramatically smart, might become a fact in itself (the richest type of fact), a commercial success! M. Godaud would in that case receive not only what he was paid for his time in teaching Madame, but he might actually place himself, as Madame's collaborator, on the American stage? But he knew that to do this successfully with an unknown name, capital would have to be forthcoming.

With his usual mixture of directness and tact, he suggested to Pauline that she should provide the capital. Pauline once more astonished him. She said: 'Well, I don't know that I think that worth while. If the play is good in itself, it ought to be taken without the risk of

capital, and if it isn't — I don't know that I care to put it out. I never have made any outlays that didn't bring me in a definite return.'

M. Godaud's respect for Pauline rose in a sudden spurt. For the first time in his experience of her, Pauline

was showing admirable sense.

'No doubt,' M. Godaud said to himself, 'this lady is asking herself if I am a serious man. For a friend why should one produce capital? I was not reasonable to ask it — but one never knows with ces gens là whether to be reasonable or not. For a lover, on the other hand, she would risk all she has. She is no longer young — one would be her last affair — even if, poor lady, with her remarkable inexperience, she has ever had a first. There is after all nothing against the idea. She is admirably rich and of a good appearance. I will proceed — carefully, of course, but I will now proceed definitely upon these lines.'

So M. Godaud proceeded. He did not take Marcelle Butin into his confidence for reasons which seemed to him sufficient. She was a good girl, who had done him a service, but perhaps she had not intended to do him a

service upon so large a scale.

Pauline became day by day more docile and responsive to the claims of his bright masterful eyes. M. Godaud did not hurry; he would have considered it as great a barbarity to address a woman without the hope (almost the certainty) of success, as to associate for any length of time with an attractive woman and pay her no addresses at all. His code had a perfect simplicity to recommend it. You either made love to a woman or you left her alone.

Pauline did not see things as clearly as M. Godaud. She knew she was attracted by him, that her whole life was enriched by their collaboration, and that her marriage with Abner seemed suddenly to have happened a

long time ago; but she did not do anything as definite as to make up her mind. She noticed that she listened rather eagerly for reasons for second marriages, and was pleased, instead of displeased, when these claims were

successfully urged.

Pauline sent Marcelle Butin into the country for a holiday to stay with her relatives; the suggestion had come from M. Godaud, who had offered to act as a guide to Pauline instead, but Pauline had been very ready to fall in with it. She liked to make kind and pleasant plans for her dependents, even when it involved her having to do her own hair.

One mysterious sultry evening, M. Godaud stayed longer than usual. They sat on the balcony watching inconsequent summer lightning play out of a dull metallic sky. It was so late that Pauline began to wonder if he

hadn't perhaps stayed long enough.

The silence which fell between them was unlike the calm and placid silences of Greenville. Pauline did not know quite how to handle it. There was a hint of danger and surprise in the sultry air, and the still moments were being handled entirely by M. Godaud, who knew all about silences.

Pauline was aware that her heart was lifting in queer sudden bounds, and that her breath came as quickly as if she were just going to be involved in an accident.

M. Godaud leaned forward and gave her wrist a quick sharp pressure, and at his touch she knew that the accident had happened.

'Madame,' he said in a swift, expert voice, 'we have been friends for a long time — it seems to me long

enough. Will you not let us become lovers?'

Pauline did not withdraw her arm from his pressure. She sat motionless with a soft wonderful feeling rising in her heart and flooding her whole consciousness. It was the feeling of a very loving and generous heart which has been too long alone and finds itself alone no longer.

M. Godaud felt himself answered; he bent forward and slipped an arm round Pauline, drawing her gently towards him, but before his lips had found hers, she drew back a little, holding him away from her with both her hands.

'Are you sure,' she asked breathlessly, 'you will not mind? I am a Protestant and I cannot change my religion!'

'Mon Dieu!' murmured M. Godaud. 'But what should that matter? On the contrary, if being a Protest-

ant makes you less strict ----?'

'Protestants,' Pauline explained hurriedly, relaxing the pressure of her hands, 'do not mind marrying Roman Catholics. It will make no difference to me at all what church you go to.'

'Marriage!' exclaimed M. Godaud, aghast; 'but, my

good child, who speaks of marriage?'

'But of what else are we speaking?' she stammered. They looked at each other in startled horror, and for a moment it would have been difficult to say which was the more shocked.

Then M. Godaud withdrew his encircling arm.

'Chère Madame,' he said, very gently and gravely, 'with all the inclination in the world — and I have the deepest and most respectful inclination — what can I do? I am already married — I have four children. If I have not mentioned them before, forgive me. I did not like to intrude my burdens upon you. But they are my burdens; it would never occur to me to shake them off. I have always been a serious man.'

Pauline said nothing. She leaned back in her chair very white and still. She looked as if something terrible had happened. M. Godaud was distressed. He rose to his feet, he put his hands to his forehead, he walked excitedly about the room. Not only had he offended a rich

patroness, but he had hurt a woman whom he distinctly admired.

Pauline was the first to gain outward control of herself.

'Do not take this too gravely, M. Godaud,' she said quietly, rising slowly to her feet. 'We have misunderstood each other terribly, but I do not judge you as I would judge a man of my own race, and I — I forgive you.'

M. Godaud smarted under Pauline's forgiveness; it seemed to him very out of place. He had paid her a compliment and in her extraordinary Anglo-Saxon mind it had become an offence. He took up his hat and bowed.

'It is true,' he said gravely, 'in these matters we have not the same standard. I regret exceedingly to have inconvenienced you, Madame.'

He bowed again very low, and Pauline gave him her hand. He kissed it for the last time, and murmuring, 'Mes homages,' a little sulkily, left her.

Pauline stood quite still for a moment, and then, with a sudden movement, as of one who seeks a familiar comfort, she turned to a big photograph of Abner which always stood upon the mantelpiece.

Pauline gave a little sob that was half self-reproach and half self-pity.

and nan sen-pity.

'Oh, Abner,' she whispered, 'Abner, it's been such a long time!'

The next day Pauline was obliged to send for Marcelle Butin, even though it was hardly a fortnight since she had given her her holiday. But Marcelle was very nice about it. She said she had found two weeks in the country with her parents quite long enough.

'One may have one's affections, Madame,' she explained, 'and yet like to go to a café in the evening.'

She made with astonishing swiftness and despatch all arrangements for them to return to New York, and then

Pauline gave her one last commission to execute for her. She gave her the play to take to M. Godaud, the play

they had written together in its two languages.

She thanked M. Godaud very heartily for his cooperation and she asked Marcelle to explain to him that, as she was not a business woman, and had never seriously contemplated publicity on her own account, she would hand all her rights in their joint production over to him.

M. Godaud expressed himself through Marcelle as being overwhelmed with gratitude for the generosity of

Madame, and he accepted the manuscript.

'Should you say she was mad?' M. Godaud asked after he had concocted this last message to Pauline.

Marcelle thought for a moment.

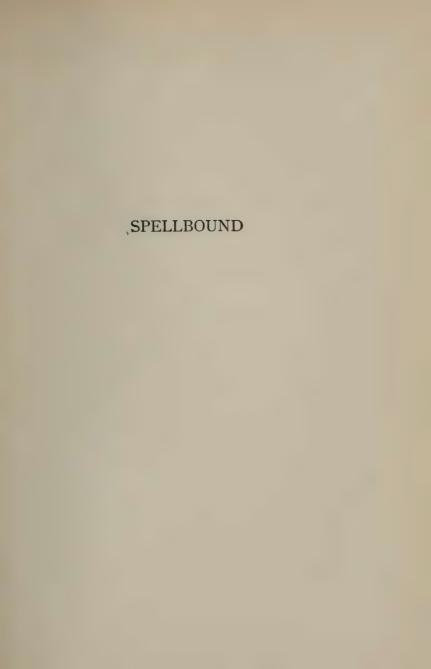
'No,' she said, 'not mad, but perfectly good. One does not come across such a type often.'

'Fortunately,' said M. Godaud briefly.

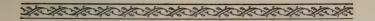
In spite of Pauline's generosity and M. Godaud's persistent attempts, in spite too of the many excellent situations the drama contained, nobody cared to undertake the risk of putting it on the stage. The least perfunctory of the managers into whose hands it fell wrote the following explanation to M. Godaud:

'There seems to be in the writing of this play,' he explained, 'a certain mental contradiction; one would say it was written from two conflicting points of view — in-

capable of fusion.'







SPELLBOUND

Mrs John Blake loved her husband with a massive, proprietary affection.

It would have been incredible to her not to love him; partly because she thought husbands should be loved by their wives; and partly because John was a very good husband.

When Mary first fell in love with John she thought, 'If this is not like John, it must be wrong'; but after a few years of inseparable companionship her formula unconsciously varied. She did not say, 'Because it is like John it cannot be right'; but what reminded her of John did not always interest her, so much as what failed to remind her of him.

They had no children, and as they were both good swimmers, they invariably spent their holidays together by the sea.

One year when John had been making rather more money than usual, he suggested that they should go abroad for their holiday. They had often gone abroad before as far as France; but no farther.

They liked the French Plages where the bathing is made as attractive as possible, and falling in love and swimming seem to be the same thing; but they thought they had better not go any farther south.

However, this year John could not take his holiday before October, so that as the sea is much warmer in foreign countries, John suggested their going to the island of Capri where he had been told that they could bathe, if they liked, up till Christmas. Mrs. Blake thought it a splendid idea, but not very like John.

After a time, when all the arrangements were made, the idea had grown so unlike John that Mary thought it was her own. 'I have persuaded my husband,' she told all her friends triumphantly, rather as if John were a kind of juggernaut under whose wheels her wishes were usually slaughtered, 'I have persuaded my husband to take me to Capri — isn't it wonderful?'

Mary found Capri quite as wonderful as she had expected. The rocky, brilliant island suggested to her fertile imagination illicit love-affairs, sirens, and mysterious adventures. John thought the hotel bills large, but the

swimming uncommonly good.

There was an English Church on the island; an arrow pointed the way to it, down a shady lane between cactuses; and whenever Mary saw a staid married couple like themselves, she would point them out to John and say, 'Look, dear — I am sure there is something not quite right about those two!' even if they were following the arrow.

The odd thing about Capri was the light; it struck up through the earth and permeated the leaves, from beneath as well as from above. On the floor of the sea were zigzag rainbows; the water, however deep it was, shone clear like a precious stone; the sea was not all one colour—there were strips of jade green and gentian blue; and the mild azure of a child's eyes.

Everyone lived in bathing-clothes; they swam, floated, and darted here and there over the clear surface of the sea in tiny little cockleshell boats called *sandoli*. The water was as satin smooth as the skin of a grape, and

the air was the colour of light golden wine.

Mary did not speak any Italian, but she thought that some of the men who came from Naples looked like the bronze statues in the museums, and that it was a pity John did not.

One night the still weather vanished. A scirocco sprang up and shrieked across the sea; the wind flung itself upon the waters till they rose up in great blue ridges;

above them the flying foam ran separately, thrillingly white, slanting towards the land. Around the rocks the waves formed into pale green hollows, and then, with a terrifying hiss, flung themselves in broken rainbows upon the tiny beach. It was impossible to bathe, so Mary sat on the terrace in front of the little hotel and watched the sea.

It was a beautiful sight and unlike any storm she had ever seen, because, although the air rang with the shrill voices of the wind, and the waves plunged and fell with a shattering violence, the sunshine lay just as usual on the brilliant yellow rocks of the island; and danced on the ravenous bright sea.

Mary Blake thought of a great many things; her breakfast - she wished she could have tea instead of coffee; Eastbourne, and how cold and grey the quiet seas of England looked compared to this mad fluttering jewel. She thought of men - other men than John. How strange they were! How they did sudden wonderful things and how, especially if they were Italians, their faces moved, and behind their faces their quick fierce minds.

Mrs. Blake was still a very pretty woman and she had seen these foreign men look at her; seen in their eyes what John never showed in his. She wouldn't, she supposed, have liked it if he had — at least not in public. she said to herself, for she always tried to be reasonable. 'I know what John is like. These men only interest me because I don't know what they are like. I always know exactly what John will do, and he never does anything wrong or strange — so I needn't worry — Still ——'

Then she looked again at the leaping, shining sea. What she saw puzzled her. It looked as if there was someone in the sea beyond the rocks — beyond the surf. someone swimming very indifferently. The arms would move every now and then like a doll's, then the big seas would ride above the pin-point of the head, but the swimmer did not rise to meet the wave, the head would be quite covered for a moment, and then Mary would see again the faint, twitching movements of the outstretched arms.

Mary was vaguely glad she had made John promise her not to go in. She began to feel a little uncomfortable. She got up and walked to the edge of the terrace above the rocky cove. She saw that the little beach was black with people, all watching the swimmer. They gesticulated violently as if they were all disputing what should be done. There were several men in bathing-suits waiting for the sea to go down before attempting to bathe, and they gesticulated more than the others, and talked to the fishermen who were standing in a little group together by their boats.

The feeble, enigmatic motions of the swimmer so far out alone, in this mad broken jewel, tore at Mary's heart. How lonely — how unspeakably helpless he must feel!— and no one, no one moved to go out to his help!

The men in the bathing-suits were trying to persuade the fishermen to put out a boat, but the fishermen pointed at the breaking surf, at the rocks; they shrugged their shoulders, and, folding their hands inside each other, showed that if you tried to launch a boat it would simply curl back under the rocks and be smashed to pieces.

Mary became breathless with excitement, for she saw one of the tiny black figures seize a rope and a life-belt and point to the sea. The fishermen again shook their heads and did incredible things with their arms to bring home to this small determined figure the implacable forces of the waves.

But the man persisted. For the first time in her life Mary was looking at a hero; and she thought to herself: 'Oh, if only John had been that kind of man, wouldn't it have been wonderful?'

For nothing that the fishermen said made any dif-

ference to the intrepid rescuer. He made them take an end of the rope and fasten it round his body, then he seized the life-belt and ran along the little stone pier till he reached the end. The waves were tall as houses and fell with the crash of falling stones, but there were little pauses between the crashes; and there was just the ghost of a chance that with luck a very strong swimmer might get out before they had time to catch him, and throw him back against the rocks.

Mary felt her whole body tense behind her eyes, as if

she too were about to make that dreadful spring.

He waited for a long minute, for two long minutes. Was he afraid after all? Did he see now that the attempt was impossible? But he was only timing the waves, for even as she held her breath, he sprang.

For a time Mary could see nothing but spray and the convulsed, gesticulating crowd on the beach, then she saw that there was a second little black head out in the

waves, moving very slowly away from the pier.

There were moments when she thought the head bobbing on the water was as still as a pin stuck into a pin-cushion, but if she looked at the end of the pier and then at the head, she saw that the band of violet blue sea between them was widening. The little feeble figure was still visible, ducking down under the waves, but, even as Mary's agonized eyes rested on it, the tossed, living creature ceased to move its arms.

Mary could bear no more. She felt too sick to stand. She went to her room and prayed, face downwards on the bed. She wished John would come and tell her what had happened, but never since their marriage had John come when she wished! It often seemed quite enough for her to wish it for John simply to stay away. It was not intentional, for she knew John loved her better than anything in the world. It just happened that no spell bound them to act unseen upon each other's minds.

The man who was out now in that dreadful sea could, Mary felt sure, have wielded such a spell. She longed to see if he was still alive, but she had no strength to drag herself down to the beach to find out; and still John did not come. She felt each wave the swimmer faced, roll over her, never for one moment did Mary relax her mind, it hovered over him stroke by stroke fighting back the enormous seas. He could not, she thought, drown while she so held him up in the passion of her prayer!

At last she heard John's slow, rather heavy steps. She kept saying to herself: 'Oh, why doesn't he hurry! O

God! Why doesn't he hurry?'

She cried out before he had crossed from the terrace through their open window.

'Oh, John! John! Are they both drowned?'

'Ah! so you've heard about it, have you, my dear?' said John. 'I rather hoped you wouldn't — upsetting business — and nothing to be done about it really — those fishermen were right!'

'Oh, but tell me! tell me!' she besought him; 'then

he is dead?'

She turned and looked up at John. He was dressed as usual, but his hair was rumpled with the spray and his face had an odd patchy look as if he had been running.

He sank down heavily in an armchair by the bed. Mary sprang up, and brought him some brandy in their travelling-flask. She was surprised to see his hands shake as he took it from her, but however upset he was, why — oh, why — wouldn't he answer her question? He was

driving her mad!

'Well, that was a woman out there,' he told her at last, 'not a man. I'm afraid she is dead; but she wasn't drowned as we had all supposed. The doctor thinks not. She would have sunk if she had been drowned; her mouth, was close shut. She was never seen to open her lips after the waves caught her. She was sitting on the rocks

watching them break — a fool thing to do with such a sea running; a wave heaved in ahead of the rest and picked her off the rocks as clean as a pin! She must have been flung back a time or two and been stunned before the seas dragged her out. Most unpleasant business. Her husband was there too!'

'Oh, that was her husband, then!' gasped Mary. She closed her eyes and for a moment she envied the dead woman her husband! What would it have been like, what mad ecstasy, to know that your husband would risk those measureless, savage seas to save you? Even while you are being dashed about in that white welter of destruction, he would be coming nearer and nearer — to save you... or to die with you!

John coughed uneasily.

'I don't think he was much of a swimmer,' he said apologetically; 'you see it was quite impossible for anyone but a fairly strong swimmer to get out in time before the seas plugged him, and then he'd have been smashed back against the rocks and not been much use to anyone!'

'Oh, John, do stop not telling me!' cried Mary. 'Who

was it, who was it - and is he drowned too?'

'Not at all, not at all, my dear,' said John hastily. 'There wasn't very much risk for a strong swimmer, I mean with a life preserver and roped; the getting in was the ticklish part of it, but providing that you kept your head and were patient, it was manageable. The fishermen pointed out the best place to try. The great thing is never to be in a hurry — especially when everything else is!'

'Oh, John, don't belittle it!' said Mary almost rudely; 'how can you know anything about it! I watched him! It was the very bravest thing I ever saw done — against enormous odds. Are you quite sure the man was not drowned?'

'Oh, come, Mary, you are making far too much of the whole thing,' said John awkwardly. 'I wouldn't, I really wouldn't have undertaken it if I hadn't seen perfectly well that it was manageable. I'm glad you didn't know it was me.'

'You!' cried Mary. 'Good God!'

She saw from his eyes that it had been John. He lay back against the chair as if he couldn't speak any more.

His forehead twitched nervously. He had the fighter's look after a long fight is over; when Memory, like an echo, forces her terrible images back into the brain. Only a man who had fought those seas could look as John looked. He had taken the trouble to get dressed and kept everyone away from her so that she shouldn't be frightened, but Mary thought of none of these things just then, rage possessed her, mad rage. He had taken her happiness — her love and his — and thrown it into the sea!

'John!' she cried, 'how dare you do such a thing? John, you've broken my heart! I never would have believed you could be so cruel! Oh, my God, if I'd lost you! I stood there watching you!— seeing you! I shall never get over it! It's as if you were drowned! How can I ever forgive you?'

'But really, really, Mary,' said John defensively, 'it wasn't too much of a job. I got her in. I think I'll take just a nip more of that brandy if you don't mind.'

She whirled him onto the bed. 'Don't you dare stir!
— or speak!' she cried, and then she sat down in the chair he had been sitting in and burst into a passion of sobs.

'Oh! Oh! Oh!' she cried, 'how could you do it? It was such a cruel thing to do! It might have been the end of everything!'

John smiled feebly back at her from the bed; he hardly

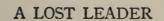
seemed to hear what she was saying, or else he hardly seemed to care.

There were often times when he seemed quite happy with Mary when she hadn't meant to make him happy.

'It's all right now,' he whispered soothingly.

Of course Mary was proud of John afterwards. She wrote home and told everyone how brave he had been. But she was never able to trust him in the same way again.









A LOST LEADER

MEN are like nuts; you can't tell what they're like till they're broken.

The general opinion about Dysart was that he was a perfect military specimen. He wasn't popular, because perfect military specimens are very seldom popular; and he was literally as hard as nails; but he was admired.

You couldn't get beyond his manner. I don't say it was bad, but if you didn't happen to be Eton and Oxford, 'county,' and a man-about-town, it could flaw you pretty flat. It was the manner of a perfectly controlled steel safe. There was a way of getting inside it, no doubt, what is called a 'combination,' but very few men ever hit it.

As for women, to hear Dysart talk about women was startling even in a cavalry mess. We were all used to plain mud, but Dysart's wasn't plain mud; it was cruel mud. He only wanted to get a woman at a disadvantage,

and according to his stories he always had.

He was a fine figure of a man, slim, tall, with broad shoulders and a well-set head. His features were good, though his eyes looked curiously like pieces of glass, there seemed so little behind them, as if they were merely organs of sight. He had those rather curved thin nostrils which people who go in for judging character suspect; but he had a perfectly clean professional record.

The two things he cared about, if you can speak of caring for a feeling that was a mere rigour of pursuit, were battles and chess. He played them both in the same cool, mathematical way, without a spark of the human

element.

Dysart was our G.S.O.I., and the General, who was not given to praise, said that he had the strongest head in the army. You couldn't confront him with any situation, however staggering, to which he couldn't sit down and

find you a way out. He would unravel the most hopelessly complicated and confused state of things as imperturbably as if the mass of murder and noise going on close by was a ball of Berlin wool he was straightening out to hand back to an aunt.

The General was not a man whose heart was easily touched; he was a genial old blackguard who wanted the best of everything quick, and to whom other people's sufferings were as important as last year's dead leaves; but I've seen even his mouth twitch over a heavy casualty list, and his hand hesitate on those immaculate staff maps before it steadied onto a point that must cost more lives still; but I've never seen Dysart turn a hair.

He would sit opposite the General with his legs crossed, smoking a perfect cigar, and without a gesture, in his quiet, toneless voice, reel off the most bloodcurdling, risky plan, as if he were telling over a list from the Army and Navy Stores. It would be a good plan, and the General would have to listen to it, wishing all the while

he'd thought of it for himself.

It was Dysart's job, of course, to give the General his views, and then leave the decision to him; but as a matter of fact the decision came with Dysart's views. You couldn't have gone against the deadly reasoning of his facts. There was never a place in his logic that an eel could slide through. From the moment he began, 'In my opinion, sir,' the General really hadn't got a chance. He could lose his temper, squirm in his chair, and curse his A.D.C. to blazes, but he hadn't the face to get away with an alternative plan.

When things happened, as things always happen in war, which smashed the neatest of his arrangements into a cocked hat—collapses, disasters, outbreaks of weather, unknown factors beating across from the enemy, Dysart was onto them in a flash. Everything worked in his mind as smoothly and with as many fresh lines to draw

from as the trains at a London terminus. Off he'd slide with 'Then in that case, sir,' and that oiled brain of his would have every detail of a new plan ready down to the last lorry, and up to the nearest inch of trench, before the rest of us had seen the hopelessness of the old one. It sometimes seemed as if he had planned a substitute for each possible disaster, and really liked it better than the success of his original scheme.

No one ever saw him at a loss, or heard him state anything that wasn't as accurate as a machine gun. As for a mistake — well! he was never in the same street as mistakes. He couldn't understand them; they didn't throw him out exactly because he was so used to other people making them, but he never saw why they made them — nor made allowances for inadvertence, or forgot that the mistake had been made.

I remember his saying to me once, when I'd been cut out in a calculation by the smallest of margins: 'It's no use your telling me it's a little mistake, Barclay; as far as I am concerned you might just as well make a big one. Mistakes are always elastic — they can stretch to anything. The point is no one can afford to be wrong.' I never felt that he trusted me again.

It was quite a surprise to find that Dysart hated the Germans. I should have supposed he'd just have accepted them as the other man's pawns; but he really had a feeling about them, a cold, deadly, cruel feeling, as if they were all so much dirt. Not human at all. I saw him tell some German prisoners off once; it was enough to make you sick. They were a poor, huddled lot, white and broken, out of a bombardment, hardly conscious, just crushed with noise and fear, and the pitiful bit of life left in them, shaking under his cold eyes.

He seized one of the men's faces and shook it backwards and forwards in his hand. It was a horrid thing to see; then he turned to the Intelligence Officer who was standing by to interpret. 'Tell this feller he's going to be taken down the line and shot.' Glenock raised his eyebrows and tried to laugh — he wanted to pretend Dysart was joking; but Dysart wasn't joking. In a voice like an iron file, he ordered Glenock to say what he told him. Glenock risked his job, and said in his fluent German, 'This officer is having a little joke; no harm will happen to you. You are as safe as if you were at home.'

Then he met Dysart's flat hard eyes and he told me afterwards that the back of his legs shook like jelly; but fortunately Dysart didn't understand either German or

Glenock.

'Examine these men,' he said, 'and see that they don't

get fed till they've answered your questions.'

I suppose the favourite type of Prussian officer must have been very like Dysart, and I wonder if that is why the Germans didn't win the war.

Hate may make a man a good soldier, but there is something that makes him a better. It wasn't hate that sent that band of young French boys, each one a hero, into their first battle with white kid gloves on their hands, because they knew they were going to meet death, and wanted for the sake of France to meet it like a lover going to his mistress.

Still I can understand a man who has no pity for his enemies, especially if he hasn't been in the trenches and doesn't realise what we all had to put up with; but I can't understand a man who has not pity for his friends.

I suppose if Dysart liked anyone he liked his G.S.O. III, Harry Osbourn. Osbourn had been to Eton and Oxford and knew Dysart's people. Osbourn got his boots and ties in the only places Dysart thought human beings ought to buy them. He was a docile, tidy boy, very graceful and charming; and he did things smartly.

One day he got a telegram to say that his mother was dead. He was her only child and she had been a particu-

larly delightful comrade mother; and he didn't even know that she was ill.

The boy was just on his way up the line to give a fairly important message from Dysart to one of the C.O.'s when the wire reached him. He told me afterwards the message went clean out of his head, the world seemed to go round with him and then turn empty. He went for a long walk instead of delivering his message. When he got back to H.Q., Dysart broke him for it. He told the boy he'd have to be court-martialled and that he'd disgraced his name. When Osbourn showed him the telegram, Dysart simply handed it back and said, 'It is fortunate your mother will never know.' And Dysart had met Mrs. Osbourn.

I think that did Osbourn in. Anyhow, he went straight up the line where there was a nasty bit of shelling going on, and what was left of him came back on a stretcher. He lived two hours and Dysart never went near him. When they told him the boy was dead, he said, 'Well, I don't fancy that feller Osbourn was going to be much good anyhow.'

I think we were all rather relieved when Dysart was promoted. He was given a brigade of his own and sent East. I took over his job. Quite apart from my step up, I felt a queer sense of escape when he'd gone — as if something menacing and heavy had been lifted from the atmosphere.

I went over a munition factory once on leave, and saw a machine with a hand like a claw—it gripped shells, shaped them, and chucked them into a bucket, all by itself. You had to be careful not to stand at all near it, because it never loosed its grip, even if what it caught hold of wasn't a shell. It reminded me of Dysart.

I had a talk with the General about him the night after he left. I've often thought about it since.

The General said: 'I've worked with Dysart for seven years. I've never seen him sick or sorry. I've never

known him out in a calculation or miss fire with an idea. He's a brilliant feller. He isn't slow and sure, he's quick and sure. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't too quick. I'm not a slow man myself, but I'm not certain if any brain can afford the pace of Dysart's. He never has it off the gallop. There's something of Napoleon in him. He thinks in mass and he thinks in detail, and he can change his thoughts as quick as a girl can change a five-pound note in a chocolate shop. I expect he'll go far. But the odd thing is he's never seen active service. He hasn't handled men. Now he'll have his chance — personally I find men easier to handle than maps, but of course they're more uncertain.'

Then we were ordered East ourselves. It was wonderful at first, getting out of the mud and the wet, and all that squalid darkness. From the time we touched Marseilles, we were dropped into a golden bowl. Light, sharp as a sword, caught everything up into itself; even fears were warmer. The sounds, too, had changed, they were the small, pleasant clamours of life; not the unceasing ding-dong menaces of death. There was something about the piled baskets of fruit, the bare, melancholy babies and archaic camels that made a lump come into your throat. It was like getting out of hell into a fairy tale.

I had only forty-eight hours of it, for our orders were to push out into the desert as quickly as we could; but I saw Dysart's name on the register of the most swagger hotel in the place, and looked him up. He was kind enough to give me a topping lunch on a terrace under the palms. He was very pleasant to me about getting his old job. I'd felt rather proud about the General's having given it to me, instead of getting some more experienced man out, over my head; but I hadn't been with Dysart five minutes when I realised that it was only the shortage of Staff College men, and the fact that all the best men were already promoted or used up, which had given me my chance. He didn't rub it in, but he let me see it.

His own oak leaves didn't look a shade too new, and I don't know where he got his uniform, but it fitted as nobody else's did in that hustled, odd-and-endish time. They had had him on the H.Q. Staff at first, but he was to bring his brigade up after ours. He was in the know all round, and I gathered that the first part of the campaign which had gone like clockwork was due mainly to him; not that he ever boasted, he was far too well-bred, he hardly ever said 'I'; but those were the facts which slid out of him.

Even while we were talking, two of the biggest Hats out there, came up to speak to him. They spoke to him as equals speak — equals who would be grateful for a tip. He gave them their tip, of course; there was never anything he didn't know, but he didn't introduce me, nor did he encourage them to stop. He would have behaved just the same if I had been a subaltern. I was his guest and, though he might have to put me to the inconvenience of an interruption, he would naturally cut it as short as he could. But I saw where he had got to. It was very near the top of the tree.

I ought to have been very grateful to Dysart, for he told me very succinctly and clearly several most important bits of information, about the country we were going into and the exact type of difficulty we should have to meet; but I never felt so like a schoolboy under in-

struction since I left Winchester.

It was to be real, pukka, cavalry work at last, and I was keen as mustard for it. Our hearts had been nearly broken in France, for we had felt like lapdogs half the time, and the other half (when we were used to fill up gaps in the trenches) like mere unintelligent stuffing. All our knowledge and our training were as useless as wings to fishes.

I gazed at Dysart with famished eyes. He had been over the top of Pisgah already, and looked into the

Promised Land.

'Wasn't it,' I asked him, 'a bit of all right - letting vourself go at last?'

A puzzled look came into Dysart's eyes. 'Go?' he

asked with a lift of his eyebrows. 'Go where?'

'Fighting in your own way,' I explained, 'not in an office any more. Leading your men?'

He smiled in a superior kind of manner as if he was

talking to a rather foolish, over-enthusiastic child.

'I haven't taken my brigade into action yet,' he explained patiently. 'Just at the start of the campaign, it was your despised office work which was needed and which has brought us out where we are. Still, that pleasure doubtless lies before me. Office work is practically over now.'

The afternoon light lay thick as a blanket over the shimmering world, colours ran together with all the harshness burned out of them by the strength of their enormous background. From where we sat we could see the minarets, slender and unsubstantial as the stems of flowers shoot into the dome of golden air. Far off between the lines of the palms, wave upon wave the desert lav like a sea of light, and standing up in the waste of its intangible waters were the darkened presences of those great stone figures, which have pressed their shadows into the sunlight beyond the memory of man.

I looked across at Dysart, smoking imperturbably one of his first-class cigars, and watching the smart women as

they passed us, with reflective, calculating eves.

'Doesn't all this appeal to you tremendously?' I asked rather awkwardly.

He might have been one of those enigmatic stone figures for all the response that was in his blank gaze as it met mine.

'You mean, do I like this place?' he asked. 'Oh yes, well enough. I have been a lot in the East. It is rather dirty and slipshod, really, but it can look quite picturesque at times. Now my idea about getting up water for the horses is ——'

We went off into his idea, and it was a vital question, of course. All Dysart's questions were vital ones; other-

wise he wouldn't have taken them up.

It was a splendid campaign. The General was like a different man; all of him (and there was a great deal of him one way or the other) was set free and working at full pressure. I think he rather liked having a subordinate less capable than himself. He gave first-class orders, and when I put forward anything of my own, he waved it away and said, 'Yes — yes — but I can't go into all that now, what we'll do is this ——'

He had a great eye for the immediate. His pet theory had always been to feed men and horses up to the last notch, give them every luxury obtainable; and until the moment of their job struck, not to let them do a damned thing that wasn't necessary. Then, when the job came, he let us all out, and we were to endure on our reserve of strength.

I must say it worked. We were all in a pretty window-dressed condition, sound as bells, and smooth as velvet. You might have thought we'd go soft on that long hot trail over sand, but we pushed on and fought, and pushed

on ahead of our supplies, and still fought.

We rushed 'em, knocked 'em, and bluffed 'em, straight out of all their little holes and corners, like good dogs after rabbits. We took places of unbelievable strength with small advanced guards, and were all over ourselves and everybody else. It was a pukka campaign and no mistake. Cavalry were meant for just such jobs, under just such leadership.

We had hardships enough — dust, thirst, and flies, pernicious malaria, sunstroke, and very iron rations. But we went through all our troubles as if they were paper hoops. The General could have had an easier time

if he'd liked, but he wouldn't; whatever any young trooper of twenty stood, the General, at sixty, went one better. He was like a boy for eagerness, but he was like a piece of india rubber for toughness. There wasn't a man who didn't feel he couldn't let him down by personal exhaustion. Everyone went to the end of his tether and then stretched it. We kept going from dawn to blessed dark, and from darkness sometimes to the fiery dawn, to get decisive victory.

It was worth it, to those who knew the East well; to sweep on and get the Turks under our heel at last. It meant that every small and lonely outpost of our great Empire would be safer for it; that every boy with the King's burden on his back would be the more solidly upheld by this new prestige. As for those who don't know the East, doubtless they will continue to profit by our

task and slang us for our pains.

Our job was over at last, and we were dawdling back towards civilisation and that fine wicked city of the sun where we should all have good times again after our own hearts — all of us who hadn't paid the price and left our bones to whiten beyond the gates of Empire, in the glory that will be forgotten, and in peace which can never be broken.

It was an extraordinarily beautiful and silent afternoon. I was riding with one of the A.D.C.'s some way in advance of the troops. The desert was purple and gold, a very deep gold, and a light, transparent purple, like those patches of bluebells you see sometimes under dark trees. There wasn't a living thing to be seen anywhere — not a leaf, nor a bird. A small nullah ahead of us checked the unbroken line.

Suddenly a man's head pushed over the top of the nullah, and then his whole figure stood on the skyline, wild and black like a scarecrow. He had three days' growth of beard on his face, and tears were running down his

grimy cheeks. He waved his hand over his head to stop us; his throat was too parched for even a cry. It was pitiful to see him stumbling across the sand to our horses' sides, gasping and crying and making no sound.

We gave him water instantly — his hands trembled in ours as we held the bottle to his lips; but his eyes were filled with an indescribable anguish worse than the deadly torment of thirst. There was a torment in him which couldn't be quenched, and as I looked into his eyes I could hardly believe my senses, for the man was Dysart. Dysart, who was crying and trembling at my feet! And when he had swallowed as much of our lukewarm water as we dared let him, he muttered, 'I say, you fellows, I've lost my Brigade.'

Glenock and I kept our eyes away from each other. We had neither of us liked Dysart, but I give you my word, we'd have parted with a good deal of money to spare him that disgrace. You see, people don't lose their brigades when they have done their duty. They get lost with them sometimes, but they don't get lost without them.

We got Dysart onto an extra horse and patched up some kind of tale to the others. Dysart rode on ahead with us. He didn't want to see the General. He was completely demoralised and beyond caring for anything — except that. He couldn't tell us connectedly what had happened to him, but he talked a lot — in a queer, running, stumbling kind of way, as if those three days in the nullah had sprung a leak in his brain.

Every now and then he would stop short and look at us incredulously, as if he were stupefied by what had happened to him. Then he would ride on, looking straight in front of him. I think he was trying to calculate how the man he was could do the kind of thing he'd done. He had never believed before that self-control was not absolute; and what had happened to him was that his control had literally snapped under the clumsiness of action. The

unforeseen had stepped in and given him a rap over the knuckles.

I wondered, as I watched him, if he remembered Osbourn, and how he had broken him for his moment of aberration; but I don't think that particular remorse came his way. He was too interested in the astounding loss of his own consistency.

He kept saying: 'I don't know what happened. I suppose I was mad. I gave such extraordinary orders, by and by they stopped paying any attention to them. I think I could have picked them up if they'd listened. I sent a messenger out, dozens of messengers, but they never came back.

'I telephoned, you know - oh, all the time - I kept telephoning, and then the wires were cut. Men rode about all over the place — they were disintegrated, like flying ants, you know how they swarm? they got in each other's way - pointless - all wings.

'I couldn't collect 'em! I couldn't get hold of 'em. I shouted, but I lost my voice. I've never had a very strong

voice.

'I knew precisely what to do, of course. Naturally I knew what to do; but they disappeared. They rode away, vou understand, into the blue. And then I lost my horse. It was such a damned peculiar thing to lose my horse. My batman was killed — several men were killed quite near me.

'Obviously it wasn't the place to stay. You fellers see that the General commanding must take shelter, don't you? Besides, there didn't seem anything to command. A most extraordinary situation, you know. Then I walked about a bit, I suppose. Anyway, I found a tent in that nullah. There must be some explanation, of course!'

He looked at us persuasively, poor fellow, as if he wanted us to reassure him. Fancy Dysart wanting to be reassured! — and by us! Of course we could only give concerned grunts. We didn't know what to say.

We were afraid he'd go mad on our hands and blow his brains out; and besides, it wasn't any use pretending the authorities would let him off. We knew he'd have to get his bowler hat. There wasn't any other way of dealing with the business. But we hoped he'd get washed up and fed, and stop that queer, querulous talking, before he had to face it.

The General was most awfully nice about it when he heard. He took Dysart into his own tent, and there they were alone together for hours. I don't know what they said to each other. The General never mentioned him to any of us afterwards, but he went with Dysart himself to H.Q. The authorities let him down as gently as they could. After all, he'd done magnificent work, but of course he had to get the chuck.

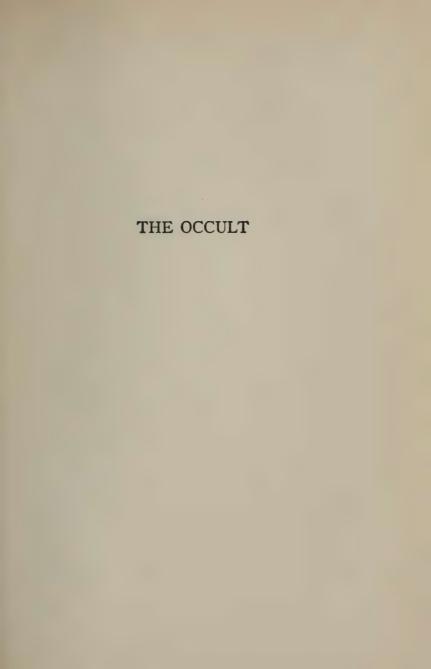
He didn't go mad; on the contrary, he went perfectly sane. He crept back into his smartness like a snail into a shell. After a bit they let him go back to his regiment; of course he lost all his honours, even his brevet; but in three months' time he'd worked himself up into being a Squadron Commander.

He was decently killed in France just before the Armistice. The funny thing was the War Office put him into the casualty list with all his old titles, Brigadier-General Henry Dysart, D.S.O., C.M.G., etc. He had a string of honours. They didn't mean to, of course; it wasn't any sentimental softening of their hearts. It was just the happy mistake of an inadvertent flapper; but it pleased his people because they thought he'd made good, and so he really had, when you come to think of it.

Anyhow, he's gone down to history in the obituary column of 'The Times' — not that dirty, broken-hearted figure climbing up the banks of the nullah, but as the imperturbable leader of men whose 'speciality' was

always 'to be right,' crowned with oak leaves and very great honour.

And the really odd part of the thing is that he quite deserved it; for both of these men were Dysart.







THE OCCULT

THE sense of her own generosity brought the tears to Isobel's eyes. How few women could feel for a younger rival nothing but pity? She closed these sympathetic, tearful orbs, emptied her mind, and sank into the Occult. There and there alone could she find out what she must

do with Nancy.

Isobel had the most perfect sympathy for Nancy's broken heart, but Nancy must realise that she should stick to it. A broken heart which tries to mend itself out of other people's property weakens even the sympathy of the most generous. Nancy had made a great mistake; she shouldn't have looked at Robert Berrington with her pleading, bereft young eyes, nor should she, by her strange vigour and her ignorant admiration, have led his vanity into taking an affectionate turn. Nancy wouldn't get more than an affectionate turn, because Isobel, who had had complete charge of Robert Berrington's vanity for fifteen years, knew that there was nothing more to get.

Robert had never been the same resource to Isobel as the Occult, but his vanity had been the romance of her life. He had never been her lover, though everybody thought he had, even at times Isobel herself. She was his valid excuse for never having been tied by a wife or bored by a mistress. She inspired his famous pictures, and everyone knew that Isobel would have been a first-class pianist if she hadn't given up her career to devote herself to Robert. All Isobel asked of Robert in return was to take his adulation direct from her; and up till now

it was a claim which Robert had perfectly met.

Once more Isobel sank down and down into the friendly, familiar darkness. She prayed wordlessly and without effort that she might learn how to lead the blunt,

blind, solid figure of Nancy out of her kingdom of shadows. Never, never would she hurt Nancy, but she would save her from herself; and incidentally from Robert.

Isobel felt the spirits from a higher plane taking possession of her; the whole situation cleared up at once. She must go to Nancy. She need not prepare what she had got to say to her; it would be given her when her hour came.

Isobel dressed with unusual care, and arrived at Nancy's flat shortly before lunch. Nancy did not look particularly pleased to see her, but she was touched by Isobel's generous kindness. Isobel had bought her a sixpenny bunch of violets, and embraced her with the utmost tenderness.

'I felt,' she said, 'as if I had to come!'

Nancy invited her to lunch, but she added a little abruptly that she was expecting an authoress afterwards, a Miss Adelaide Cross; and she said it as if she didn't

expect Isobel to stay to meet her.

The trees of the Square gardens shimmered through Nancy's windows; her flat was large and beautifully decorated. Everything in it had a value and a fineness of its own. The pictures on her walls were signed by well-known names. There was even a new portrait of Robert's—a most seductive picture of Nancy, better looking than Nancy was, and exaggeratedly young.

'How Robert has got your sorrow!' Isobel murmured

tenderly. 'That look of deep, unchanging sorrow!'

Nancy flushed. Of course her sorrow was unchanging, but this was not the point with which she found herself

most anxious to impress Robert.

Isobel wondered if, after all, this was the right moment for the Occult; but when Miss Cross was announced, she saw that the famous authoress need not retard, nor in any way weaken, her message; in fact, she would probably act as an unconscious ally. Miss Cross was one of those dark, soulful, middle-aged women who are almost certain to be in tune with the infinite. They had not been talking for ten minutes before (with hardly any prompting) she admitted that she was deeply impressed by the Occult.

In spite of her interest, she added, she knew very little technically about it. This was not, however, a disadvantage; Isobel had never been able to accept whole-

heartedly the methods of other occultists.

Nancy roused herself from the self-centredness of grief sufficiently to say: 'What fun! I mean how awfully interesting, of course! Couldn't we have a séance or something?'

Isobel smiled gently. She knew now for certain that

her hour had come.

'We couldn't,' she explained, 'have a séance. I don't, you know, deal with the more primitive types of manifestation; but I am often inspired to do spirit drawings of people, and from them I read their characters and their futures. They are revealed to me by the Higher Powers. Shall I try to draw one of you, Miss Cross?'

Miss Cross assented fervently.

Isobel took a large piece of paper, closed her eyes, and let the point of her pencil wander across the sheet. She had taken no particular dislike to Miss Cross, though she was not as a rule fond of successful women, and women writers in particular annoyed her by their abortive attempts at psychology. Her pencil zigzagged continually across the paper, till it stopped with a jerk. After a surprised glance at the pattern, and an effective pause, Isobel saw what the Higher Powers thought of Miss Cross.

Miss Cross's character was plain, and her future could be deduced from it. She wanted to be a success, but it wasn't exactly what the Higher Powers saw her as being — not at least a great success. Some of Isobel's deductions limited Miss Cross rather painfully to the second-rate. Still, on the whole, Isobel spared her. She read what Miss Cross's mind held about herself, and gave it back to her, wrapped like dried Arabian figs, in the spiced leaves of her wit.

Miss Cross accepted the scented fragment with philosophy. After all, she knew she wasn't quite first-rate, and she would have thought less of Isobel's gift if Isobel

had praised her more.

'It is all *most* interesting,' she said; 'and your friend here, Mrs. Hastings? Do draw me one of her!'

'Shall I, darling?' Isobel asked affectionately. Nancy consented with a curious little shiver.

Isobel closed her tired, sophisticated eyes — eyes that had looked too many years upon a world which had given her no possessions. Force flowed into her and a

great peace.

Her message flamed across the darkness, as a falling star tears its way across the stuff of night. Isobel's hand moved rapidly to and fro over the paper, till the pattern was like the jagged scar of an old wound. For a long while she was silent, gazing down at it, until the right words took shape in her freed mind.

The two women in front of her breathed quickly.

'It's violent,' Miss Cross said at last in a low voice, 'curiously violent. Look, you have broken the point of the pencil! There, where the pattern crosses itself!'

'Yes,' agreed Isobel, 'there seems to have been a great pressure. Something powerful took hold of me and shook

me.

'You have a strong, ardent nature, Nancy — noble and open-hearted; but there is a wild untutored force in it, which might overturn what stood too near to you.

'In some ways your nature has, I think, defeated itself. Do you see these vivid crossing lines which efface the pattern? It is as if you had had an instrument in

your hands, a very fine and exquisite instrument, and in your impulsiveness — in your mad energy — you have

broken it to pieces!

'Your nature exacts too much. Perhaps, without realising it, you are a little too violent, a little too tied to a standard for others? Perhaps your generosity, which is very great, has too forcible an influence upon those it tries to benefit? Perhaps, great as your gifts are to others, you exact from them something greater still - something illegitimately great? I could imagine you shocking and alienating a sensitive - perhaps an oversensitive being? But you are the soul of loyalty! You might disappoint from an intellectual failure to apprehend, you would never change! This is the greatest gift of your nature; and you are right to trust to it! What you have once experienced is there in your heart forever! You must return and return to your former beloved, until you understand the limitations and conditions of his affection. I see you broken by a great unhappiness. I see you rebelling against the loneliness it has fixed upon you! Stifle this rebellion! By facing your grief, by refusing all temporary delusive compensations, you will in the end restore to your life what it has lost!'

Nancy stirred uneasily. She sat hunched up in a corner of the sofa like an unfledged bird on a nest's edge,

scared and yet longing for flight.

Miss Cross murmured sympathetically: 'But if she has definitely lost something, isn't it perhaps rather a hard fate to ask her to cling to her losses? Do you feel

sure this former possession will be restored?'

'I am not here,' said Isobel with gentle austerity, 'to give my own views, nor indeed any mere mortal judgments. Something speaks through me—this Spirit declares that Nancy's only safety is in constancy, a complete and absolute constancy to an indissoluble union. Should she turn from it, should she deflect her heart by

so much as an intemperate friendship, she will violate her true self, and ruin any prospect of future happiness. That is all I have been given to say to you! Nancy, darling, I see a creature very beautiful — very incomplete — whose ultimate completion depends upon its constancy!'

Nancy sobbed. This primitive sound was an unexpected interruption to their conversation. They had all been sitting so coolly and comfortably in the shining, sophisticated room, so far away from the noises and nuisances of actual life. They had touched the fringes of the innocuous unknown with such safe fingers. But this cry from Nancy tore straight across their security. It was like a fatal accident on a voyage of pleasure.

'I don't see why I should never have anything!' sobbed

Nancy.

The quick tears rose to Isobel's sympathetic eyes.

'You will! You will!' she murmured. 'Don't you see it will all come back! Only be patient. Only hold on to

your constancy and your inner calm.'

'He can't! He won't!' sobbed Nancy. 'I haven't any inner calm! He isn't like that either! I know he won't come back, and if he did, how do I know that I want him to — he — he hurt me so!'

Miss Cross looked uncomfortable but excited. She said quickly to Isobel: 'Oh, can't you do a spirit drawing of him — of her husband — if she means her husband — perhaps that would help her!'

She spoke as if a spirit drawing of Nigel might act

like a dose of sal volatile.

'The psychic ignorance of writers!' Isobel found herself murmuring almost aloud; still, she was not unwilling to draw a spirit portrait of Nigel.

She once more wrapped herself in darkness and came out of it with a strange twisted rope of lines, while Nancy watched her with the tears still streaming down her cheeks.

'Nigel,' Isobel explained, 'is a most complicated character. He is strangely ignorant of himself - poor thing - I suppose no one could know less in what his truest happiness consists! But there is an immensity about him — a strange power of vision and of readaptation. He needs space to turn round in. There is a depth to his nature and his understanding of others is truer, dearest child, than your own. He will see one day, see suddenly and completely; and from that moment he will understand everything that has happened to you both. He too has been and is tormented with grief! I see it all so clearly - his stricken sensitiveness, his incapacity to explain himself, the conflict! the heartrending, hideous conflict! He needed to free himself. There was no other way of accomplishing his great destiny; for I see that his destiny is great - greater, I somehow feel, than yours! He is thinking out his soul; he is weighing yours in the balance! However far distant he may be from you, he will watch and return, dearest child, if you remain inviolate! As I see it, as it is borne in on me, all you have to exercise is your loyalty and your patience. Shut the door to others, open only for him! He is already on the path of return!'

Isobel felt the beauty of her carrying voice; she felt conviction borne in upon the tearful girl; upon the interested authoress — upon herself! She was inspired! She was the disinterested channel of a divine message! The Powers of the Unseen World were straightening out all their lines through her. Robert was safe. This thought flashed curiously into her mind, which had until that moment overlooked the existence of Robert.

An electric bell broke the strained silence. Isobel felt suddenly very tired; she hardly noticed the elderly professor from Vienna, to whom Nancy gave such an unnecessarily warm welcome.

Isobel wondered if she had better go home. She

thought of the noisy streets with dread; her inner calm was shaken; if only she could have afforded to take a taxi! She heard the conversation going on around her dimly like the conversation in a dream. Her hands felt tired and heavy on her lap; she saw that they looked like the hands of a middle-aged woman; they looked, too, as if for the hands of a musician they hadn't been enough used. The word 'hand' dropped suddenly into her mind out of the conversation. Miss Adelaide Cross was speaking.

'Ah!' she said, 'are you really the famous Herr Andreas Müller, the expert on handwriting? I have so often wanted to meet you. I suppose it is an impertinence for me to ask you, but we have just been having a most interesting Occult exhibition from Miss Underwood, who reveals character through spirit drawings. One would so like to contrast her method with your own!

Could you give us a specimen?'

Isobel turned her head and looked at Professor Müller. He was a pleasantly insignificant little man, shabby and earnest; only his eyes smiled faintly, as if whatever joke there was had barely enough strength to break

through the more fitting habit of his gravity.

'I do not study calligraphy for money,' he said slowly in painstaking English. 'I do it to help the Viennese police; so certainly you may ask for a specimen. The science of handwriting is not an inspiration like this lady's — it is only a study. I have no powers. But I will tell you anything there is in your handwriting. Which lady is it who wants to have her character read? She must excuse that I say what I see! Sometimes ladies expect to be pleased; and the truth about a human character is seldom pleasing!'

'You must tell Miss Underwood's first,' said Miss Cross playfully, 'for she has escaped so far; it is we who

have been the victims of the Occult!'

Was there a derisive gleam in the eyes of the lady novelist? Isobel was too proud to refuse, but she was displeased at the impertinence which exposed her to the dubious inferences of the shabby little man. She wrote a phrase hastily on the back of an envelope, and handed it to him, with less than her usual graciousness.

Professor Müller held the piece of paper clumsily between his finger and thumb, and said in a conversational

tone:

'Yes, very interesting. You are one of those who evade all struggles. In the affections you take and offer what has no serious call upon your heart. This is not because you set your claims low; on the contrary, no passion however great could satisfy you.'

Isobel stared in amazement at the absurd professor. 'Surely — surely ——' she said pleasantly; 'however

arrogant my claims may be, I give — it is a well-known fact ——!

'Please do not interrupt me,' said Herr Müller with unexpected sternness, 'well-known facts are very misleading. I say only what I read. Since I do not know you, I cannot be controversial about your character. You have gifts, but you fear to develop them lest they fall short of perfection. You will not enter the market-place of life, because you are not sure of your goods. So far have you carried this exclusion that you have had to call upon another world to defend you from the judgments of this one. You find great peace in this other world, for there your desires and fancies rule without conflict. What you fear is criticism and competition, but having annihilated these obstacles, you are free to think of yourself and to persuade others to think of you, what you will.'

Isobel would have stopped him if she could, but his stumbling, cruel words went on with all the incisiveness of fate. Panic choked back her utterances; whatever he said, whatever happened, she must appear to bear it—she musn't give herself away before those two women, she must rise superior to the faulty judgment of this impertinent stranger. She must keep the silly smile on her stiffened lips, to hide the crushing fear behind it.

Her peace, her powers, were they after all a mere door shut on a flurried escape from life? Had she missed having Robert, because she would not dare risk losing Robert? Were her exquisite, fastidious denials nothing but funk? She remembered how, half an hour earlier, when Nancy's primitive cry broke through their tactful handling of the situation, she and Miss Cross had exchanged the commiserating glance of superiority. Nancy had exposed herself—she had given herself away. Isobel and Miss Cross would have been torn to pieces before they had revealed themselves by crying aloud for any man. Was the delicate screen of their self-respect nothing but a furtive evasion?

Isobel drew all her forces together to hide the ravage of her loss; none of these three should guess what the

little man from Vienna had done to her.

'I'm afraid you make me out rather selfish and cowardly,' she said with a bright smile, 'but at any rate you must admit I do think of others — wherever I get what poor little powers I possess, I do try to use them in the service of humanity! I know I am not commercial; I dare say I retire from market-places; but whenever I can,

I give!'

'It is true you give something,' agreed the Professor mildly, 'but not, I fancy, what you suppose yourself to be giving. If you were a biologist, I should say you would take a baby in your two hands for the sake of an experiment, and give it a prick to see if it would cry; and when it had cried, you would say, "Ah, poor thing!" and prick it again. Otherwise you would not be interested in babies.'

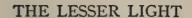
There was a moment's pause. It would have been awkward if Isobel had not been able to laugh; she laughed quite cleverly, a ringing imitation of amusement. She asked for more light upon the characters of the other two ladies; it came, but Isobel did not hear it.

The words about her own handwriting burned on in her mind. Once she looked up and saw the eyes of the woman novelist fixed on her with a blistering amusement. Nancy had been flustered and distressed at the Professor's unflattering delineation of Isobel; she had felt the bit about the baby wasn't quite nice; but she didn't know she had been the baby. Nor had she really followed what had happened to the Other World. Robert was still safe.

It was Isobel who was the victim; even if she had saved Robert, the familiar half shades which had hitherto sufficed her would never suffice her again. But even Robert was a minor loss. She had never depended upon Robert; but she had depended upon the Occult. It had supplied her with all that she needed — a mysterious, an inexhaustible supply; according to her faith it had been unto her; and now the bubble of her faith was pricked.

She made her escape smiling triumphantly to the last. Outwardly, Isobel was still the sophisticated equal of the woman novelist; the superior of poor, primitive Nancy; the care-free antagonist of the dreadful old man from Vienna; but inwardly she was bereft of all her powers. Something had happened to the Unseen World; it was no longer spacious enough to hold her.









THE LESSER LIGHT

Miss Beryl Wilson, who had always been very much admired, had only one vanity—she was just a little proud of knowing how bad her writing was. The coterie which formed the entire taste of the island fed her with a whole-souled adulation, which reflected beneficently upon themselves. Was she not their only authoress—then must she not, for their sake as well as her own, be the best?

The lesser critics wrote with awe of her style as if it were an intimidating quality; the greater ones spoke of her work — when they spoke of it at all — as 'competent.' The word cut Beryl like the lash of a whip, but she accepted it. If it is true of a beautiful woman that she can only give what she has, it is even more true of a mediocre writer.

Beryl Wilson nursed no illusions. She wasn't for all time, with no circulation at all and the starving dignity of genius, nor was she the financial prairie fire of her day. She sold in two or three thousand, just enough to make her living and keep her little white villa afloat on the island which she romantically loved. She was the bright particular star of the English and American colony, their centre, and their boast. She was even, so the laxer ones thought — besides being brilliantly clever — almost unnecessarily good.

She couldn't have had more than one love affair if she had had that; otherwise Capri would have known all about it. The two points that were thoroughly grasped in Capri, from the oldest to the youngest inhabitant, were, how much money the 'Forestieri' possessed; and how much love. Beryl Wilson had very little money, but she was generous and had lived on the island long enough to escape depredations. The Capriotes despised equally one

of themselves who robbed a friend, and one of themselves who failed to rob a stranger. Beryl Wilson was a friend, but the extraordinary innocence of her affections continued to puzzle, and slightly sadden, the inhabitants.

At thirty-five, with a slim figure and a wild-rose colouring, she was painfully unattached. Romance had re-

mained for her on the fringes of Life.

But if Beryl had no love affair, she was not without a secret ardour. Above all writers, above all women, she adored Avery Fleming.

Nobody called Avery's books 'competent.' They were often neglected, oftener abused, but when they were

read, as Beryl read them, they became a passion.

They were difficult books to read because they asked of their admirers a rigid attention and that kind of imagination which has to strip itself of all adventitious aids. They were not cold books, but they required a

cold intellect to grasp them.

Beryl Wilson thought she had grasped them; she read them over and over, and what astonished her most was the way in which Avery struck straight at the heart, without apparently making any appeal to it. There was no initial pathos in Avery's works — there was none of the tremolo stop of a too active sympathy. The beauty in them, if you went deep enough to find their beauty, was like that of a headless statue, suggesting more than it gave.

It was a great excitement to Beryl to learn that Avery Fleming, whom she had never seen, was expected at Capri. Almost everybody came there sooner or later. Sometimes they drifted there in boats and stayed for twenty years, sometimes they came for a week-end and stayed at the Quisisana; but just because everybody else had come it wouldn't have surprised Beryl to have heard that Avery had gone to Ischia and said nothing about it.

But if she were really coming to Capri, Beryl de-

termined to provide her with a suitable reception. She went at once to see Katherine Armstrong, the rich and cultured American woman who lived in the biggest of white villas with the most pronounced of sunny terraces. Katherine's villa had the advantage of an umbrella pine, a sweep of apricot cliff, and a grotto, almost inaccessible, but the colour of blue flame. Even if Katherine hadn't been so cultured, it would have been the best place to ask Avery to tea.

'What has she written?' demanded Katherine in a hushed excitement. 'You must lend me one of her books

first — is she really so very wonderful?'

'She's the best writer we've got,' said Beryl. 'We haven't a man to touch her — except one or two of the older writers — and they're no better. All her inches are ells really, but she gives them to you like inches' — and she repeated the titles of Avery's slim productions.

'Dear me!' said Katherine, 'of course one has heard of them — but I don't believe for a moment she's half

as good as you are!'

Beryl groaned. She went to see all her friends and they all said the same thing. Some of them had read Avery and didn't like her—and some of them were merely prepared not to like her without having read any of her works.

There was a general impression that her books were always uncomfortable and sometimes coarse. She needn't say what people thought in bed and, if she made beds all right, which she often unexpectedly did, she shouldn't turn a bucket on the beach into a revelation of obscenity.

And yet in an ordinary Capri sense, she was hardly improper enough. For so often nothing happened in her books worth speaking of, and everybody was married to the same people in the end that they were in the beginning. Beryl didn't try to defend her goddess; she only kept repeating, 'But, my dear, she is wonderful!' and

explaining that Avery wouldn't care to have her books talked about, anyhow, so that it didn't matter really

whether they liked them or not.

Everybody said they would come to tea and thought what fun it would be to watch the two great authoresses meet. Beryl couldn't help hoping that Avery would know, know that *she* knew how impossibly ignorant it was to class them together! After all, perhaps she could count on Avery knowing, because that was what Avery lived for — not to know one thing about one person, or to have one general impression about a great many, but to know everything about each of them, visiting every human being as they came before her, with the sound impartiality of air.

Beryl spent a long time dressing for the tea; she always dressed carefully, and bought her clothes at the best shops. You could see that her colour and line were not only admirably suited to her delicate, graceful body, but the actual product of her mind. She knew how to dress, just as she knew how to behave; and no one ever

knew how to behave better than Beryl Wilson.

She came late on purpose, and found Avery already there. She had wondered for years what Avery looked like — there were no photographs. Her friends said of her, 'Oh, beautiful!' and other people said, 'Weird.' Beryl was vaguely disappointed at her appearance and at the same time vaguely relieved. She was just as goodlooking herself and better dressed — and yet ——! Avery Fleming had a long white face with a strong, slightly lifted chin; her eyes were enormous, but they were too prominent, and they weren't at all piercing, they even on first sight looked a little dull. Afterwards Beryl realised they weren't dull; they were merely veiled.

Her manner was very simple, but when she smiled it was as if something had happened. She had the place of honour and everyone was being very nice to her. Beryl

saw with relief that they were all treating her with respect without making a fuss; and apparently Avery liked it, for she seemed quite at home and happy in her big chair on the edge of the wide white terrace, looking straight down into the untroubled sapphire of the sea.

Without any obvious arrangement, Beryl found that they were talking together while everyone else listened. Katherine, her two rich American friends, the dazzled Russians, a group of half a dozen artists, and the English

and American Consuls, all lent appreciative ears.

Nobody on the island could talk as well as Beryl, and she knew that she had never talked so well before. Fine phrases and discriminating words rushed to her lips; satisfactory images were supported by the pleasant grace of her wit. Avery wasn't being at all brilliant back, and yet Beryl knew that everything she said, the slightest of her quiet, rather hesitating answers, were worth all the rapid utterance of her own sophisticated flow.

They were both of them thinking, but it was as if Avery didn't have to think in a hurry. She had no improvising trick; what she expressed, when she expressed anything, was the handsome accumulation of her mind. There was even something tentative and unfinished in the form of what she said; but the essence of it was revelation — not so much of her personal vision as of the truth which her mind reflected.

Whatever she said — even her silences — made the same emphatic difference to Beryl that Avery's smile made to the secret beauty of her face. Avery's words were as much landmarks as Katherine's great umbrella pine; and that splendid velvety shade which hung the night on its arms was no more a feature of the sparse, rocky island than Avery's infrequent, pregnant words were the scenery, solid and unpretentious, of her open mind. Avery's mind had all the distant, austere clarity

of the South; she didn't have to live in Capri, because she would always have possessed it. There was no need for her to dress in lovely clothes, for the moment she had them on the clothes became lovely enough.

Avery Fleming was what Beryl, all these worshipping years, had thought her; but Beryl couldn't help wondering, while she so splendidly set her off, if she wasn't

something herself to Avery Fleming?

She knew Katherine thought her wonderful. She knew all her group of admiring, insensate friends thought that she really had come up to the scratch. They even dreadfully thought of her as having surpassed Avery. Beryl knew they would say later how much cleverer she had been than the quiet woman who just looked at her and gave those unambitious answers; which only Beryl knew whipped her out of court.

But if Avery wasn't taking any trouble to answer her, at least she must know that trouble was being taken, she must be a little grateful, a little touched at the ex-

tent to which Beryl was putting herself out?

Avery Fleming gave no sign; she sat there a little vague, very still, with eyes which grew appreciative

when they escaped.

At last Beryl made her great venture. She said impressively: 'I do hope you are going to stay a long time, and that you will come to my little studio to tea with me one day, or do you feel perhaps that teas on such an island are a waste of time?' Beryl flung in this diffident retreat, not because she thought for a moment Avery would take advantage of it, but because diffidence was a habit with her. It took off the edge — sometimes a little formidable — of her intellectual supremacy. If she hadn't been diffident, she might have appeared self-complacent, whereas she was renowned in Capri for the fact that her modesty was even greater than her wit. Avery, apparently, hadn't allowed for Beryl's manner, she just rather stupidly took her at her word.

'If you really won't mind,' she said, with her rare, exquisite smile, 'I won't come to tea - it is, I think, a little difficult to cut up our few days for the insides of houses!' Of course they might have had tea on the terrace.

Beryl felt the whole room turn antagonistic. They were revolted at the inconceivable arrogance of Avery. 'She ought to have been only too glad, too proud, too pleased!' was in the air — and with it, intolerable pity for their poor denuded Beryl who had received publicly such a setback.

Beryl fought down the hot shamed colour in her cheeks. She spoke instantly in a bright, unshaken manner: 'But of course I understand,' she exclaimed, 'and as there are so many charming rocks on the island, I shall hope one day before you go to meet you on one of them!'

She said it beautifully, without the faintest suggestion of annoyance. There was perhaps just a little delicate hint that rocks would be appropriate for manners so barbaric; and then imperceptibly, with the same graceful courtesy with which she had challenged Avery's full attention, Beryl slipped away from it. She hovered here and there making herself the laughing centre of other groups, until she could quite naturally - held, kissed, adored, regretted - slip out of the door.

She was alone at last in Katherine's marble hall, with the pink and white oleanders and a small fountain. Between the white pillars, the fine blue line of the sea lay -

a deep, smooth floor of azure.

Beryl stood quite still; she felt in her heart a bewildered finality. She was disposed of — not as a writer only, she would readily have disposed of herself as a writer — but as a human being. Avery hadn't seen, hadn't been able to guess how deeply, how passionately Beryl understood! She thought she was like the rest of them — only rather more of a bother! The door onto the terrace opened behind her; she heard a swell of voices; everybody always stayed too long at Capri, and did Avery know that no one must go before she did? Then the door closed again and there was nothing but a spray of pink oleander against the blue of the sea.

Suddenly she heard the voice she thrilled to hear, saying: 'I so hoped you hadn't gone! I wanted so much to speak to you — to explain. It was so stupid of me! I was afraid when you asked me to tea that you were Prudence Drake — the woman who wrote all those books I've never been able to read. It was so silly of me, but I was afraid to meet you again and have to say I hadn't read them, that I couldn't! — and now Miss Armstrong has just told me you are the writer of "The Open End." Will you forgive me? I've always wanted to thank you for it — to say that it seemed to me a singularly adequate story.'

She paused, for Beryl hadn't opened her lips, had done no more than turn and look at her in stricken silence — for she was 'Prudence Drake'; she had never written 'The Open End.' She had read it, and thought it rather loose and silly. But she pulled herself together because she suddenly found she was going to cry, and said instead

in a voice that actually trembled:

'If you only knew - if I could only tell you what I

think of your writing ----'

But Avery brushed this aside; she didn't really want to know what anyone, even the author of 'The Open End,' thought of her books. She spoke instead intimately, beautifully, with just, unexaggerated praise of 'The Open End.' When she had finished — as if after all it wouldn't be gracious only to talk of Beryl's work — she said, coming back to her own:

'I'm glad you like what I try to do. It is the same, isn't it, as what I think you've — in that short story of yours — really done? To stand aside, not to get in the

light? It is the only important thing to do, isn't it, if we believe there is a light!'

She held both Beryl's hands, she looked into her eyes with those splendid great eyes awake and holding world within world of the discoveries of thought. It was the most wonderful moment of Beryl's life — and it didn't belong to her.

She overcame the impulse to say it didn't. There would have been an ugliness about it, like taking revenge. She needn't do that. She could go away, and even if Avery found out afterwards — as she was almost sure to do in so small an island and inhabited by Beryl's inaccurate but admiring friends — she would just think the temptation had been too great, and that to take praise that didn't belong to her was the kind of second-rate thing Prudence Drake would do! Or would she see further still with those deep, disinterested eyes of hers and understand that the moment really belonged to Beryl simply because she could enjoy it, even if it didn't!

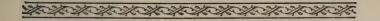
Avery might see that — she might see anything!

Beryl didn't know, and she even for a moment didn't care, what Avery would make of her false acceptance; she was too interested in what she had got hold of — the fragment of a precious secret! She knew at last what was the matter with her work! It was what was the matter with her talk too, that extraordinarily clever talk all Capri so enjoyed. She never got out of the Light! She stood there, gracefully illumined, in front of any light there was. She had destroyed her art and hidden, by the charm of her personality, the unapplauded insignificance of truth. But there was something she wasn't going to do - a support she still had courage not to cling to; she would not force upon this gentle, kindly artist the ugliness of a gross mistake! She pressed Avery's hands, she thanked her with her voice and her eyes, and took away with her intact the tribute that she had not deserved.









MICHEL

PART I

MICHEL looked like Giotto's Saint Joseph in the Flight into Egypt. He had the stilted, wizened features common to early art, the same rigidity of gesture, and an air of being foreshortened so as to get Mary, the ass, and the Christ-Child well into the centre of the picture. He never washed, chewed tobacco persistently, shaved once or twice a year, and wore a crimson waistcoat several sizes too large for him.

He was a gardener by instinct, by profession, and by heart. The garden into which he poured his being was a flat, square piece of land, without vistas. It was not 'a haunt of ancient Peace'; what peace it had was very young. The trees had been planted in their owner's lifetime, a small shrubbery of fir trees sheltered the garden from the mountain wind, and a heavily fruited orchard scattered over an acre of lawn made a pleasant place to dream in, or if you did not happen to be one of the few worst birds — to nest in. The owner allowed all but the more predatory of the birds to exist in peace. Michel fought his master violently upon this point, but in vain; he was welcome to exterminate rats and insects, but he was to let birds alone. Michel too loved birds, birds on the wing, or birds in other people's gardens; but in his own garden he preferred them dead. Deep in his heart Michel did not consider that the garden belonged to his master. How should it? This casual, pleasant young man who gave orders, and walked back into the house; who took long travels and once actually missed a whole lively spring; and when he came back wanted Michel to plant rice like the Japanese? Michel planted the rice for him between two long tunnels; something went wrong with it, and the whole piece of ground was wasted; Michel's work was wasted; and of course the rice! What could you expect when a young man who merely owned the ground interfered with Michel's omnipotence?

Michel was not a Socialist; he despised politics. 'Let every man,' he said on an occasion at the village inn, 'get on with his work. What he does belongs to him, nothing else.' By getting up at four o'clock all through the light weather, and going to bed at ten, Michel made his six-acre garden respond to him as an æolian harp answers to the touch of the wind. Roses grew for him as they grew for no one else. They swarmed over the high gates, and trellised the house; they broke out in easy crimson beds from June to November carpeting the front lawn. The standard roses, which had to have special manures thought out for them and perpetual readjustments of soil, took up a great deal of Michel's time, and he was as proud of them as if they were his children. He would murmur their needs and their histories out loud to himself all day long as he hurried to and fro about the garden. He had interminable conversations with his own brain; he argued with it, swore at it, coaxed, pleaded, browbeat it, half out loud, and half to himself.

'There, there!' he would say, 'silly old man you! I tell you the hay must be got in to-night. I can't help your legs, can I? You ought to have had four, then there wouldn't be all this trouble! The pruning can wait. Then there's the grafting of the apple trees. Number six won't yield fruit — always runs to blossom like a young girl to ribbons! The Herr Baron said to take Number seven apple tree and graft it onto the one by the gate. He's a young sheep's head! No, I shall tell him I have done it; but the apple tree by the kukuruz bed is better, that will I graft and not the other! So I shall save both respect and apples! Curse all slugs! They breed like flies in a dog's fur! To-night I must spend two hours

killing them. The hay will be good this year. I wish I was the cow to eat it! If God gives rain, and not too much rain, I shall have the best peas in Austria. It is a pity there is not a gardener in the sky instead of the Herrgott; one might be able to depend on the weather then! But there, it is not likely that there is a God at all. I know there are worms because I have seen worms, but if there is a God why has no man seen Him? Politics, religion, women — what fools men are to believe in them! Ye! Ye! Isn't the earth enough for us, and what we can get out of it? Why do we need to have women? No sensible man would have made them, born to give trouble. Think of the clothes they buy - then they must dance and go to theatres! They must have churches too, to confess their sins in. Stupids! Why sin? And then they invent a Devil so that there can be somebody to blame besides themselves! Grrrh! Well - they've set their little traps for me in vain! Ha! Ha! A blackbird wouldn't be taken in by them - far less a man that can outwit a blackbird!'

Michel was over fifty and it was true no woman had ever won anything from him, beyond curses. His mind was full of the growth of vegetables, grass cutting and apple trees; he had no time to spare for cultivating things which could walk about by themselves, and did not need his hand or his care. His sunken eyes, set far down in his head like small blue flowers, knew a tenderness deeper than any challenge of sex. He could love as well as any man, but what he cared for most were little trees. They shared his heart with a fountain he and his Herr Baron contrived together. They made a small circular pool, lined with cleverly cemented stones, and a thin pipe of water rose out of it shifting to and fro in the wind. Michel planted rushes, and a fern or two around the fountain; he watched with deep interest short-lived families of goldfish flickering under the shining water till their brilliant activities ended abruptly in the gullet of a kingfisher, or, more tragic still, in Michel's absence they would be snatched out of the water by the persuasive claws of visiting cats! At last they all vanished, to be replaced by a wily and lethargic trout with more staying

power.

Then there were Michel's animals! His master bought them, of course, but they became Michel's animals! A cow, three goats, rabbits, and a vast expanse of pig. This creature was one of the proudest possessions of Michel's heart; when the garden obstinately subsided into winter, the pig continued thoughtfully to take Michel's concentrated care till Christmas and then — But next year there was another one even so voracious. even so increasingly, meltingly, remuneratively fat! Michel himself was averse to fatness: he had never gained a kilo in thirty years. No man who gets up at four to stalk the dew and catch the dawn wind waking the first buds; who works all day under the sun so that he knows where each ray falls in every hour, till the last light licks the orchard into gold; and the mountains, transparent as amber, turn a solid blue, hanging like heavy banners in a Procession of the Virgin and then roll up into the night no man who eats only a bowlful of salted milk with flour and bread in it before he goes to bed will grow fat. He will become wise, perhaps, old certainly — but not fat.

Michel never quite left the garden, even at night, his room had an earthen floor and was hung with dried grasses, festoons of onions, herbs drying for the winter, and pumpkins so large that there was scarcely room for his bed among them; and bits of the garden fell into his short deep sleep. Michel would have lived a peaceful life, however hard, if he had not had enemies. The weather was his chief enemy; it made him very angry. There was something at once casual and spiteful in it—like a woman. It crossed his wishes, and even occasion-

ally undid his work. He had a dark suspicion that some occult feminine influence was at work upon it. The moon. for instance! Who knew what went on in her? Shining and white and saucy, flicking her uncertain way through the clouds, always changing her figure and coming up in some new place in the sky? Stars remain fixed, or if they fell it was decently all of a heap, like a man drunk on a Saint's Day: but the moon minced, she was up the sky, down the sky, dodging behind mountains! You couldn't put your finger on her; and she changed the weather. The master denied this simple fact; he didn't even believe that if a pair of fish were drawn in the calendar there was going to be rain for forty days. No doubt butterflies deny snowstorms! But just when you thought the weather was going one way — it went another! Sure enough, a new moon! That's what she called herself — new! Pretending to be young when all the time she was as old as the hills and ought to know better! How were you going to know when to plant?

After the moon, came the servants; all the other servants were Michel's enemies, especially the cook. She wanted things out of the garden, unreasonable perpetual things. Sometimes she had to have them: as if it wasn't enough to have to fight insects and rats, to chivvy birds, and kill thousands of slugs by candlelight, but human beings had to come in and scatter your wits with rage!

It was true Michel liked his master. He was very goodnatured, the Herr Baron, like a kindly young god; perhaps he understood dimly that Michel's roots went deeper than his apple trees. Still he wanted his own way sometimes. He built two summer houses, and had sweet peas planted around them, although he knew that Michel hated summer houses and thought the soil unsuitable for sweet peas. And finally he married. This was like a burning patch in Michel's brain. His whole heart turned to anger. A woman! A mistress in his garden! With a right to trample on his sacred flower beds and pull at his roses! Women always pulled flowers so that they tore the plant and prevented further growth; they never nicked them in the right places or used scissors. Michel cursed out loud steadily for twelve hours when he was told the Herr Baron was going to be married. He literally replanted the garden inch by inch with curses, and then he found he might just as well have held his tongue. For the very first time the new mistress came into the garden. Michel saw that she wasn't a woman at all — she was a flower! She seemed to fit into the garden as if it had been made for her; she was young and tall and fair with a head as golden as the heart of a lily; and she never picked his roses. Michel picked them for her, with no other compulsion than her smile. She gave him tobacco to chew and worked him a heavily embroidered pair of carpet slippers for winter evenings. Michel never dreamed of wearing the slippers, but he planned to be buried in them — they were the kind of shoes to wear in Paradise.

Michel forgave her swallows' nests in the house: he built small huts for nesting birds, and fastened them onto his own trees to please her. In time he grew to share her devotion to coal tits. These very small birds, with black velvet caps, snowy breasts, and neat dark wings, were her constant guests. She sat all one June watching the tits balancing on the high cow parsley under their white lace umbrellas, swinging up and down above a sea of clover; and in the evenings, when all the birds were still, Michel would stand motionless in the garden listening to her singing to the young master, as if a nightingale had settled in her throat, and just because she was so like a flower, with a heart as sweet as honeysuckle, and no enemy in all the world, she died before the next year had turned towards the sun. If sympathy is a measure of feeling it is probable that Michel felt more for his young master than any of his rich friends and relations. Grand people have so many things to think of and so many people to love. Michel had so few. He never said anything to his master, but he made a resolution to keep the garden exactly as it was and never to leave it, even if he had to plant intensive rice every spring. He would only ask his Herr Baron one thing in return, to be allowed to look after his young mistress's grave. He would carry out the Herr Baron's wishes, of course, he explained, but he did not want anyone else to be allowed to touch it. The Herr Baron, smiling at him with eyes out of which all the light had gone, agreed to his request, and Michel retired satisfied. No grave in the Friedhof was like Michel's grave. It was as if each blade of grass grew richer and more freshly there than elsewhere, and the flowers might each have had an angel to invent their birth, instead of a gardener with so fierce a temper that half the village thought him mad.

PART II

An incredible thing happened — not the European War (that was the kind of thing that might happen any day, if a few important elderly men got to talking politics in the dog days) - but a contradiction as sharp as a break in the law of gravity - Michel married. It came upon him like a thunderclap. He had been cutting his second crop of hav late in the summer of 1916. It was a splendid crop, sweet, with thick-headed clover and tall with cow parsley. The long grass which fell to his scythe and flourished like a deep green wood was full of golden bees. Michel cut four acres with his own scythe and finished it off with clippers to make the edge of the lawn neat. One acre over the front lawn and around the fountain before the sun was up, two acres by the small fir trees and under his master's window finished at noon, and the fourth by his dead mistress's summer house, where

the coal tits came punctually for vanished bread crumbs and did their swinging on the lace-topped parsley; and this he finished before the sun was set. The second day he tossed, from a dew-soaked morning — the trees thick with shining cobwebs — till the clouds came out in a troop from behind the high mountains threatening storm. Michel worked like a thing possessed; he cocked the hay from end to end, drew a light cart out of the barn, packed it four times solidly, a man's height above the wheels, and dragged it (crawling like an ant under a gigantic twig) back to the barn again. It was all in. the last cock, the last sweet gleanings, before the clouds broke and the rain came. Michel had won his race: but he was trembling and faint with fatigue; his brain was on fire, he was soaked to the skin with sweat. Too tired to undress, too sick to eat, he huddled in a corner among his vellow pumpkins, watching the forked lightning play about the kitchen, painting in sharp lines on the wall the menaces of age. He was nearing sixty, and six acres take it out of a man. Till now Michel had neither known nor cared about the war; it had made very little difference to the garden. His master, with the first expression of pleasure anyone had seen on his face since his wife's death, had gone away to fight. He said to Michel before he went:

'Take care of the garden — this may be a long war.'

Michel had spat tobacco juice at his master's feet, wrung his hand, and promised. The war drove out in ripples, ever widening its circle of penury and pain, until even gardens felt the difference. There were registrations and restrictions; a man could no longer call the work of his hands his own. Michel knew, as he faced the lightning on the wall, that he wasn't being fair about the garden—it was not quite as it had been when his young mistress had left it. He needed help. His master couldn't afford a boy, that was certain. Boys, once as common and as

cheap as blackberries, had suddenly become valuable and rare. A woman? Michel's soul recoiled at the nightmare this vision conjured up! Even women were not as cheap as they had been. Women weren't - but wives were! Wives are always cheap. A wife, too, can be cursed and beaten when necessary. Michel swore bitterly to himself as he thought of his fate; men married because their heads were weak and women caught at their weakness, but his head was firm as a rock — it was his legs that he couldn't be sure of, and it was on this weakness that the sex fastened. He might have to give in after all to women! It was as if a man, accustomed to the breath of Heaven all his days, voluntarily descended into an airless prison. passing sentence upon himself for life. Michel loved to work; it was at once his religion and his sport; but how could he trust himself with his six rich acres while his hands trembled so that he couldn't hold a cup of milk? He had done too much perhaps because of the storm. But one must count on storms. They do not stop for age. Storms grow fiercer, they come oftener. There is always something happening, and as one grows older there is always less to meet it with.

In the village lived a stout middle-aged widow, Schultz. Her husband had had something or other cut out of him, and died of it. There was nothing against the widow Schultz except her sex. She was fifty-odd, remarkably strong, good-natured, used to work. Well! she'd have to get a good deal more used to work before she was through with it! She did. She married Michel three weeks after the hay had been got in. She married him because she was lonely, because she had not expected to be married again, and because it was a triumph to overcome Michel's triumphant bachelorhood. She believed (all women are credulous as to their own attractions) that he liked her for herself. But she didn't believe it long, for from the day he married her Michel rubbed it into her, that he

didn't, couldn't, and wouldn't like her! She wasn't there to be liked: she was there to work from dawn to sunset in order to add another pair of legs to the garden. The widow Schultz was not cut to the heart by this treatment. She remained stout and good-natured; but she was continuously ungratified. Sometimes she cried loudly and long, and Michel, who was used to unbroken silence. cursed her with such violence that she took refuge in the barn and slept in the deep sweet-smelling hav. Even in the depth of winter she slept there sometimes, so blazing and queer was the light in Michel's eyes. But when she came out again she worked. She tied a handkerchief round her head, and wore sabots without stockings; her face was the colour of a half-ripened plum. She had good blue eyes, but they were the kind of eyes that go with curiosity and a long tongue. Michel had no right to object to her conversation, for he talked to himself out loud for hours at a stretch. But talking to yourself and being talked to are totally different experiences. One you can modify at will (and there is in all forms of self-expression something lulling to the nerves), and one comes at you with the affront of a strange dog to a village. Every instinct Michel had rushed out in violence against his wife's attempts to exchange words with him. They were not thoughts - the widow Schultz had not got any thoughts - but they were words which referred to Michel's interests, as if she had a right to share them. The widow Schultz did not mind working all day, or carrying enormous weights on her back, or cooking after ten solid hours on her feet. She would have liked a Sunday dress, but she managed with one made out of an old curtain given her by the young master; what she did insist on was speech after the day's work was done. That was why Michel beat her. His master, on his short leaves, expostulated severely with Michel.

'Why do you beat her?' he asked disgustedly.

'She talks,' said Michel briefly.

'But my dear old fellow,' said his master, 'so do you!'

'But not to her!' Michel explained; 'only to myself!'

'But why did you marry her?' his master urged; 'surely when you married her you expected her to talk sometimes?'

'Not to me,' said Michel grimly. 'She gets her food and a roof over her head. She should ask no more.'

The Herr Baron shrugged his shoulders helplessly, tipped Frau Michel excessively (for he was very poor

and very generous) and returned to the trenches.

Fighting on the top of the Dolomites in the dead of winter wasn't a very simple job, but it was simpler than the married life of Michel. The garden at any rate prospered. It shone like a burnished copper pan. There was not a weed in it. Other people's gardens as the war progressed became shabby and dishevelled. Michel's alone vielded all and more than all it had yielded before the war. When Michel's Herr Baron was wounded, he was fed on eggs from his own chickens. He did not know this, for he had ordered all eggs to be sent to the nearest hospital, but they weren't. They were hidden in whatever he ate or drank, and invisibly nourished his extremely meagre person. Michel grew more and more sour: he refused to speak to anyone, even other gardeners, over whom he had every right to triumph. Only the garden itself still communicated with Michel; his plants grew in his brain until the roots of things became one with his consciousness. He never made a mistake about his plants; he even found out the weather before it happened. He believed the birds told him of it. He knew each one as it came back season after season. Michel always fed the birds who did not migrate when he hadn't enough for himself; and each year the swallows found their house nests ready for their mating.

The Frau Baroness's grave bloomed with a procession

of flowers. Something lived on it till the snow came, and slept under the snow, to live again. Michel had his piercing tenderness, and almost every night (unless she

slept in the barn) he beat his wife.

In 1918 came the Breakdown. In France, America, and England it was Victory, in all the other combatant countries it was Peace, but in Austria it was the Breakdown. Everything that was bad before became worse. People had starved with hope; now they starved without hope. The maimed were maimed in vain. Mothers mourned their sons in vain, and wives their husbands. Children would have mourned their fathers in vain, only most of them died of softening of the bones instead.

It was difficult under the circumstances to think of welcome even if the Social Democrats had encouraged it, and yet, human hearts being what they are, people wished to welcome their returning heroes. They had heroes, and if they were defeated — the more heroes they! Michel did not enter with much interest into the welcoming of his master. Not because he was not proud that the Herr Baron had won all the medals possible to acquire — everything in fact except what he had set out to win with that smile on his face; but because Michel knew better than the villagers that his master wouldn't want to be welcomed. Still Michel sent some second-best flowers for a wreath, and helped to put up evergreen arches with appropriate mottoes over the gateways, and hammered rather a good white wooden dove on the church door. When he came back from these duties he found his wife in the kitchen simmering with suppressed excitement.

'They say,' she told him, 'that everything is going to be different now. Nothing will belong to the Herr Baron any more. Perhaps not even the pig. We shall own everything. It has all been arranged by the Government!'

'Women's nonsense!' growled Michel. 'I have just come from the village — I heard nothing. You will tell me next that roses are to grow head downwards!'

'No one tells you anything!' said Frau Michel with a tactlessness which neither time nor beatings could impair; 'you are such an old turnip-head full of maggots. But from now on all our work belongs to us. Wasn't it me who kept the pig alive all last winter on God knows what, nursing it as if I had been its mother! Well, then—it'll be my pig! That's only just. And they may tear the medals off the young Baron in the streets! They have off some of the officers in Wien and Linz. Still I should be sorry to see that happen! He's a good young master and I don't see what he's got out of the war except three holes you could see the sky through!'

Michel swallowed his soup steadily, but his eyes

burned.

'Let them try pulling his medals off,' he muttered; 'they'll start to run if he lifts his hand to them! Don't I know them! Those who did their duty in the war will do their duty now; and he's one of them. What do they say will happen to this garden?'

'That,' said his wife triumphantly, 'will be cut up

into bits and divided among all the villagers.'

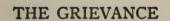
Michel put down his soup and took up the hammer from where he had laid it after nailing the white wooden dove upon the church door. Very methodically, as if it was part of the decorations he had overlooked, he struck again and again at his astounded wife. He struck so violently that Frau Michel, with her mouth open to scream, shut it again, and with a long, wavering sigh fell forward onto her knees, and then onto her face. The silence seemed to spread all over the room. At first it was a comfort to Michel, but afterwards it made him a little uneasy to think that she would never break the silence again. He waited for a time, as if to give her

every chance, and then went out into the garden. It was a clear November night; the stars seemed extraordinarily high, distant, and preoccupied. There was nothing visible in the garden except stars, and a layer of deeper darkness cast by the little apple trees. The cemetery was only a short distance from the garden. Michel went there now. He was not upset, but he had married for the sake of his mistress's memory, and now that he had wiped his marriage out, it was to the thought of her he turned. He had accomplished his purpose; the garden was as perfect now as it had been when she was there to see it. The violets above her grave smelt extraordinarily sweet. The Herr Baron would be pleased to-morrow when he saw the care taken of her grave - that would be his real welcome. The weather would be good. Nothing could spoil the triumphant entry. The mayor, the director, and the priest would all be in their places, and if there should be any trouble in the crowd, there would always be the policeman. Pfarrkirchen had only one policeman, but he had a uniform, and no one would dream of disobeving his orders. Suddenly it struck Michel that he had committed a crime. It did not strike him with remorse; it struck him with bewildered annovance. One of the things that policemen were for besides keeping order at welcomes was to arrest men who killed their wives. Michel had had the best of reasons for killing her certainly, but it was an unreasonable world. Under all these splendid stars, with the processes of nature so orderly and so serene, man had accumulated unreason, as gardens accumulated work. Michel began talking out loud to himself very busily with his Giottolike gesticulations (he looked more than ever like Saint Joseph defrauded by some desperate oversight of the Mother and Child), and he was found there, talking busily to himself, late the next morning.

For a long time Michel was put in a place with a

strange garden, but, owing to the exertions of the Herr Baron, he was allowed to attend to it, and there was nothing in a garden that was very strange to Michel. Plants are the same everywhere if you know how to handle them, and even the weather went on being as uncertain as usual.









THE GRIEVANCE

Ir he had been going to be hanged himself, he would have walked briskly; a man is not a successful editor at fifty without having learned the pace at which to take painful things; but Peter Masters had not the makings of a good executioner and he had got to hang somebody else.

It would, he knew, be kinder to put Emma out of her pain as soon as possible, but it wasn't going to be very kind or very pleasant to put her into it first. Peter Masters was by nature kind and pleasant, and when anything disagreeable had to be done, Emma had always done it for him. There was a cowardly hope at the bottom of his heart that she would suspect the object of his visit, and before he had time to execute it, commit the intellectual suicide which would relieve him of the horrible duty of slipping the rope round her neck.

Peter was a very busy man, but to think this problem out he had refused his motor, and positively loitered along Kensington High Street, with perambulators attacking his legs, shopping ladies walking through him, and errand boys switching under his elbows like live wires.

How would Emma take it? He had known her intimately for twenty years and he was quite incapable of saying how she would take anything. He was a married man and he knew exactly how his wife Rosamund would have taken what he proposed to do. She would have made it impossible.

Rosamund was dead. She had been very lovely, like the picture of Burne-Jones's Beggar Maid; she used to sprawl in exactly that half-hearted manner against delicate tapestries with an expression in her grey, wistful eyes as if she had never looked a beefsteak in the face. She would have got the last ounce out of King Cophetua without asking for it.

Rosamund had a pathetic tender droop at the corners of her mouth; it had taken Peter a long time to realise it was not caused by spiritual hunger, but by an insatiable

discontent. Even now he wouldn't say greed.

For twenty years Peter Masters had lived with Rosamund's massive dissatisfactions. She was as slender as a reed and had the disintegrating power of the Laocoön. Still she hadn't throttled the life out of Peter, because Emma was too much for her. Emma had managed to have an inexplicable, untiring admiration for Rosamund and she had, added to this, a humorous common-sense which bridged all their difficulties. Peter would have thought her tact astonishing if it had not been habitual.

Emma held off the Laocoon coils from Peter and kept Rosamund reasonably fond of her while she was doing it; but Emma wasn't Peter's ideal woman. She was rather like an armadillo, a very good-looking armadillo, with a hard, firm shell all over her, a big, kind, florid face, fine eves, thick hair, and sound teeth. Her virtue was impregnable, but the way to her heart was easy. Emma had come into Peter's life when he was nearly down and out. He hadn't capital, but he had brains; he had energy, but no staying power. He knew how to deal with literature, but he did not understand the butcher. Emma simply took the butcher and all the loose, jagging ends of everyday life straight out of his hands. Ostensibly she was first his typist and shorthand secretary, then his chief reporter, finally his assistant editor. Actually she was, as well, the hinge on which the door of his being turned.

Emma wrote quite well too; not with imagination (the one faculty she hadn't got was wonder), but with a neat, capable, open style out of which the meaning stared you in the face. She had seen 'The Meteor'

through all its early difficulties, her capital had saved it at an awkward juncture, and her steady, unflagging spirit had filled up the blank spaces between the spurts of Peter's vivid talent. She took her stand an inch and a half beyond the Public's nose. This was the right distance, but the Public, since the war, had changed. Its nose wasn't quite where it had been, and Emma hadn't changed with it. She was fifty, and women at fifty seldom keep their agility. Emma wasn't dull yet, but she wasn't as dashing as she used to be, and her hand was just a little heavy.

Peter, as he reached Saint Mary Abbott's, magnified these defects as extravagantly as possible. While he walked up the cloisters he murmured that he must be honest with himself, but what he really meant was that he must (if he was to get off at all in his own self-esteem)

be a little dishonest with himself.

'I must think of the paper,' he said firmly, gazing from the little square into the open door of the church. 'She'll be the first to see that for herself.'

Would she? Mightu't she, perhaps, think that he was

simply chucking her for Malcolm?

Peter dived impatiently up the alley which led to Emma's small, old-fashioned, enchanting doll's house. He told himself it was a coincidence that his only son had to have a job. Malcolm was young and unimpaired, that was the point — fresh from the exasperating atmosphere of four years of war, he had settled into his father's paper with quite extraordinary skill. He had been at it two years. He knew his job now, and Malcolm was certain that he knew Emma's. Malcolm looked at the problem with the dreadful clarity of twenty-four. Poor old Emma was past her job; the paper was his father's paper. His father was an awfully intelligent old chap. Still, there it was — the intelligence of old chaps wanted rubbing up by the intelligence of new ones. A news-

paper wasn't like a cathedral close — bishops over eighty sitting on minor canons rising sixty. What the paper wanted was the new tone. Peter Masters had heard the new tone. He didn't particularly like the noise it made; but for the matter of that he didn't like aeroplanes over his country garden, nor the breezy independence to be found in his chauffeur's manner. The point was that, though he was fifty-five, he could produce the new tone if necessary. He could watch his own grammar slip into the staccato slush his son called style. He didn't really mind vers libres; but Emma couldn't. She always wrote smooth, steady English without a jolt, and she said vers libres were slovenly. So they were, of course, but they got hold of something which Emma's tidiness missed.

Emma was, after all, a dead lion. Malcolm was a live dog, and he was Peter's dog. Peter's only son. Emma had never had any children, except her vicarious share in Peter's. She had nursed them through their childish illnesses before hospital nurses could be afforded. She had struggled with their childish faults, especially if they showed any tendency to droop, and placed large giltedged prayer books in their unresponsive hands when it was time for them to be confirmed.

She had never been Peter's mistress. This was a pity, because if she had, she would have understood a good many things she didn't appear to understand. She had never even known that there was a time in poor Peter's life when he would have given anything if he could have had a mistress. Peter wasn't at all immoral, and he had done without. He couldn't have managed his ethereal wife, the substantial Emma and somebody else; but if his wife could have been less ethereal, or Emma's virtue had been a shade less obviously robust, it would have been much easier for Peter.

Malcolm had put the matter in a dreadful, modern

nutshell when they had been talking it out the day before.

'She hasn't any claim on you, has she, beyond money?' he asked. 'If she has, that would be awkward, I'll admit; but if she hasn't, just give her something generous down. That's all she's earned.'

'Something generous down!'

Emma had given Peter her whole waking life, but she couldn't expect, with times what they were, and London stiff with bright young men, for that to matter. Nor could she get another job worth eight hundred a year when she was rising fifty.

Emma had grown more florid as the years went on. Her face was like the high deck of a liner; her hair, which she had unwisely dyed, was less thick, and she did not handle it with skill. She never used powder. Perhaps that was better with those very large pink cheeks — a roughened pink does not take powder well. Still, the fact that she didn't powder added to the hardening pressure of the years.

Peter was angry by the time he reached the neat painted door. He was angry with himself for his cruel thoughts, he was angrier still with Malcolm for suggesting them, and he was angriest of all with Emma because

the suggestions were true.

Miss Hobbs was in. Emma's house was immaculately clean, relentlessly tidy; a pin would have blushed to lie on her floor — dust was unknown. She had good furniture, fine old bits they had hunted out together in their younger days. Some of them he had given her on anniversaries, and some of his own best pieces in his big city house she had given him. Emma managed furniture better than clothes. She took more care of anything that had to do with outside objects or with other people. It was a pity, since she herself might have had more to do with other people if she had taken better care of herself.

He walked upstairs gloomily and noticed that the banisters shone with a bloom finer than his own. Bloom does not come on banisters without love. Emma was a housekeeper whose servants not only served her, but adored her.

She started forward to meet Peter with the unbecoming eagerness of a tall woman grown stout. Unfortunately Emma had never realised that she would have looked more like a girl if she behaved less like one.

'Oh,' she said hurriedly, 'how nice of you to come and

see me! This is like old times!'

Peter took refuge in the thought that Emma had noticed these were new times.

'I'm particularly glad to see you,' she added, 'because I rather want to air a grumble. Do sit down in that

comfortable chair and I'll ring for tea.'

'Thanks, I've had tea,' said Peter. He wished she wouldn't always talk first of what she had on the top of her mind. Emma never had the feminine art of first relieving the pressure of her visitor's thoughts before stating her own. She had a man's directness and a woman's volubility.

'It's been bothering me rather,' she went on, 'that you haven't given me more to do lately. I've felt crowded out. You didn't touch my leader again last week — the one on the coming election. You took Malcolm's, which, to tell the truth, I thought a little too personal.'

The whole thing was upon them with a rush; she spoke playfully, but there was a queer gleam in her eye

rather like anger.

'Malcolm,' she finished, 'seems to be cutting me out.'

'You've always worked too hard,' Peter said, using the first cowardly kindness that came into his head. 'Better take things easy for a bit.'

The gleam in Emma's eye sharpened.

'I don't know when I've complained of fatigue,' she

said. 'You know I'm a glutton for work. Why on earth should I take things easy?'

Peter looked vaguely about him. A willing victim would have been very much nicer — one that likes flowers and music and didn't keep her eye on the knife.

'The time comes,' he said lamely, 'I suppose, when we all have to go slow. It's part of the process of letting up.'

'But not,' she said quickly, 'not before we've got slow,

Peter? I don't want letting up.'

'I don't know about wanting,' Peter said more firmly. 'As far as I can see that's not taken into consideration very much from start to finish. Who wants to be born or die? Not the people who have to undergo these processes! And I suppose it's the same with everything else. We're like people on short rations, our appetites are rather larger than the supply.'

'But,' Emma stupidly asserted, with the puzzled angry look fixed upon him, 'the work's the same, isn't it? "The Meteor" hasn't fallen off at all? You know the circulation has increased this year. You said yourself our bad years were as satisfactory as most people's good

ones!'

"The Meteor's" all right, argued Peter. 'But time doesn't stand still, Emma. Malcolm's nearly twenty-four, you know—he's done two years slogging at odd jobs for the paper. I really think he shapes well. Don't you?'

Emma's eyes had now developed that peculiar gimlet quality Peter thought so efficacious with people he disliked. It seemed to go through them gradually without reprieve till the bottom of their mind was reached, and

when reached, held.

'You're not thinking of retiring, are you, Peter?' she asked slowly. 'I think if you were, you would be making a great mistake. Certainly Malcolm shapes well, but he hasn't finished shaping yet, I hope. He wants a good deal

of polishing, very much harder work, and less of the notion that he's running a platoon, or whatever it was. dear boy, he did run during the war! Bless him for it. but it's rather bad for their raw civilian heads to have had their authority so young! The policy of an im-

portant political weekly isn't a rag!'

'No, it hadn't occurred to me to retire vet,' said Peter with a quaking heart, 'though of course that'll have to come too, some day soon. But as you say' (though she hadn't said it) 'there's hardly enough work for the three of us on the top. Maicolm does need more work - more scope for his young powers, and I couldn't think of offering you any lower position on "The Meteor," even if one was vacant.'

The silence grew as awkward as he had feared. It grew more awkward. It was as tense as if Emma was expecting something more. Emma's volubility was apt to dry up at a crisis, and leave her quieter than any woman he knew. She was quiet now. She looked at him across twenty years of comfort, the comfort she had been to him. and the comfort that being with her had always involved. It rose up massively, confronting him like a bitter accusation. This was the only uncomfortable moment he had ever had with Emma. He looked about him at the familiar room, with its deep armchairs, its same old carpet, the Bartolozzis on the pale cream wall, the June sunshine melting against the stiff flowered cretonnes. Emma always had good patterns: her Victorianism was tempered by Ruskin, and her sense of art stopped reasonably at comfort. Peter had always thought of Emma's house as a home; he thought of it as a home still - a home out of which he proposed to turn her.

It was a cruel dilemma for him. What did he owe Emma? His son's career? His only son restored by a miracle out of the shambles? Malcolm had put it per-

fectly straight.

'Am I,' he had asked, 'to be a loafer with an allowance

or your successor training for his job?'

Peter loved his son. He didn't love Emma. He had never conceivably dreamed of it. She was like a sublimated typewriter whose ribbon never needed changing. He had only used her. He had used her with ease, with relief, even with affection, and she had obviously liked being used. He had taken her money and it had helped the paper at a pinch. She might have lost it (it was her whole capital), but as a matter of fact it had been a very good investment. She hadn't got much more money now, because, like all women who earn big incomes, she was wildly generous and extravagant. One thing was quite certain. She couldn't go on living in Pitt Street.

'Do you mean,' Emma asked quietly, 'to chuck me for

Malcolm? Oh, Peter!'

She had never said anything to him in that tone before. Not even after she had sat up with his dying wife for five nights, and Rosamund's faculty for administering pain not failing her at the last, she had given them a harrowing deathbed scene. Peter had found himself with his head in Emma's lap, sobbing like a child. She had been beautiful to him then. He rather disliked remembering how exquisitely kind and tender Emma had been, because it showed how dire had been his need of her. But even then she hadn't said, 'Oh, Peter!' as if her heart was breaking behind the sound of his name.

It was absurd. Why should her heart break over a

business transaction?

'I shall never forget,' he said with awkward solemnity, my gratitude to you, Emma. I hope you realise how deeply we all feel it, the children as well as myself? Our appreciation for you is enormous.'

'Appreciation,' Emma said with an irony he had never suspected in her. 'Oh, Peter — people appreciate their cooks! I don't know what you mean by gratitude; if

you take away my work — you take away the whole of my life! Surely — surely you can't mean to turn me away? I haven't made any mistakes, have I?'

'No,' Peter agreed, a little doubtfully, 'you're an experienced newspaper hand, my dear Emma, and very valuable. Still, without making bloomers, one may notice a certain — a certain sinking of vitality!'

She interrupted him. 'You mean,' she said steadily, 'I'm too old? But you are five years older than I am,

Peter!'

'Yes,' he said nervously, 'of course! But I don't exactly mean that. Still, naturally, as a woman——'

'Please don't cast that in my teeth,' she interrupted him bitterly; 'I've been so little of one! All these years, haven't I been to you, Peter, just like a man? You see, there hasn't been time for me to be anything else but what you wanted of me — and you never wanted me to

be a woman, did you?'

Peter pushed back his chair. He was suddenly conscious that Emma had a grievance against him. Something he had never suspected in her. This was not a new anger she was showing him. It wasn't because of Malcolm, though Malcolm no doubt had aggravated it. It was something she had kept a very long time behind her armour. She meant to keep it hidden still, but her armour had been pierced, and for a moment he caught a glimpse of a smothered wrong. If she had belonged to the present generation, she would have dragged the wrong out then and there and confronted him with it. Perhaps that would have been better than the fear of what the wrong really was - cold at his heart. It muddled Peter completely because he had never come within a thousand miles of wronging Emma by a thought.

'Women,' he said, clearing his throat, 'are conserva-

tive, you know, Emma. You've worked like a man, of

course, but your mind's like a woman's.'

'Malcolm says I'm old-fashioned, then?' she asked swiftly. 'That I'm like Charlotte M. Yonge, no doubt? Because I don't admire blasphemy nor accept musichall morals? But he forgets that even the maligned Charlotte was a power in her day, greater than he has yet produced in his!'

'But he wants his chance, you see, Emma!' Peter urged appealingly, 'to produce something. After all, if you'd been his mother you wouldn't have stood in his way! And you've been like a mother to him all these

years!'

'But I'm not his mother!' she cried. 'You forget I'm no one's mother! No one's wife!' She stared at him with a startling hostility, and then got up abruptly and crossed the room, turning her back on him. He wasn't sure if he really heard her say, 'And I've not even been any man's mistress!' But of course he couldn't have heard any such thing from Emma. It was his terrified and guilty imagination which put the words into her mouth.

Had he really prevented the fulfilment of Emma's womanhood? He saw her for a moment with different eyes. She was a magnificently healthy woman, robust, full-blooded, with a rare energy, and she had been starved. He had never had to spare her fatigue or remember her sex. He had never dreamed that she had any sex to remember. She'd never had the mildest of flirtations to keep up her sense of attraction. If he hadn't touched her hand, had any man? If he hadn't kissed her firm wide lips, had any man? She swung round from the window confronting him once more.

'We won't speak of gratitude,' she said curtly. 'It's an ugly word, isn't it — and as useless as it's ugly. But if I've ever been worth anything to you — must it be

thrown away? You've remembered my age, but you've left it to me to remind you that what you find no use for won't find a market elsewhere!'

Her pride made her throw away her advantage. She wasn't pitiful any more. She had all the strength of attack, and all the weaknesses.

Victorian women are good at self-control, but it doesn't pay them. If Emma had gone on losing hers, Peter would have been at her feet. As it was he thought her attitude singularly lacking in taste, and mentally dishonest.

Why couldn't she see that to ask a man out of gratitude to sacrifice his son's career was a great deal more than her services, noble as they had been, were worth? Malcolm was right, though he'd hated the boy's way of putting it, when he'd remarked, 'After all, if old Emma slopped over us all, it was because she liked it, and I don't quite see why we should have to pay for it by slopping back when we don't like it!'

Of course Peter saw it differently — at least he had seen it differently before Emma threw his gratitude in

his face.

'You haven't heard yet what I propose,' he said gently, but in a tone of fatigued authority. 'My idea was to give you, as well as the value of your original share in the paper, double the amount for the rest of your life. You saved my paper by risking all you had when it was in a tight place; it is only your due, now that the paper has so increased in value, to double your original holding.'

'An unearned income!' said Emma, 'for a working

woman!'

'Certainly not,' replied Peter, 'a very well-earned income.'

Their eyes met, defiant, speculative, the eyes of strangers.

'I should be glad to be able to live on here,' said Emma after a long pause, 'but not at that price. I didn't, you know, when I risked my capital, stipulate for any return.'

'No,' said Peter with all the cruelty of a good man in a false position, 'nor when you gave us your wonderful friendship did I suppose you would expect me to sacrifice Malcom's future to it.'

She put her hands up over her face as if he had struck her.

'Oh, I don't! I don't!' she stammered. 'Please, please go away! Do anything you like! I'll write! You don't understand — it was only that the work was all I had!'

'Forgive me!' Peter said quickly. 'Dear Emma, don't send me away! Why ever should you? Of course I understand, and so do you. Nothing but business need be any different, need it? In five years' time I'll be facing the same music. It'll make it a great deal easier for me if you don't throw me over — because I've been — as I'm sure I have been — stupid and tactless in the way I've put it?'

'No,' she said, still hiding her face, 'it isn't the way you put it — that's not why I want you to go away; it's the thing — the thing you have to put! And you don't

- even now - know what it is!'

It lurked again, that curious grievance — nearer the light this time — so near that Peter held his breath and then it turned back once and for all, and he knew that he was never going to see it.

Emma took her hands away from her face and held

them resolutely out to him.

'My dear old man,' she said in her cheerful, hearty, dusty voice, out of which all the bloom and all the cadence had long ago been driven, 'nothing would be sillier than for us to quarrel over this wretched business. "The hungry generations" have trodden me down,

haven't they? Well, there's nothing to be done about it but for me to stay down. Fortunately for me, I'm not hungry! Not even hungry enough to double my income out of your friendly compunction! Go now - but come back again some day, of course, and tell Malcolm that his "old Emma" wishes him all the luck in the world!"

Peter was enormously relieved. This was how he had hoped she would behave, like a man in her absence of fuss, and like a woman in her readiness to sacrifice herself. It was a trifle hard, perhaps, to ask her for the best points of both sexes at a crisis, and she wasn't to be

blamed that for a moment she had faltered.

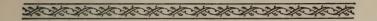
He shook both her hands heartily and let them drop. 'And we'll be friends always?' he said, going briskly to the door; 'that's settled once and for all, isn't it?' She didn't falter this time, she said quite steadily,

with smiling eyes, 'Yes! That's settled - once and for

all. Peter.'







THE OTHER ISLAND

WHEN Gwendolen Trask said in her flat, pleasant voice that she thought it would be just too wonderful to go to Capri together, Hamilton disposed of the enchanting blue shadow on the horizon by an irritated wave of the hand.

He didn't want to be rude, but he had been bored so often and so ruthlessly by Gwendolen's wonders that the mere thought of having to supply a response to a fresh one plunged him into perversity. What he disliked most was to be in beautiful romantic spots with the person whose mere existence prevented him from enjoying them.

When Hamilton Trask had married Gwendolen for her money, he had overlooked the fact that he was too good a man for the job. He had come to the conclusion since that people with fastidious natures shouldn't do shabby things; and that it is no use having a fortune to dispose of when you cannot dispose of the wife who must accompany it.

Gwendolen's fortune had liberated all his tastes. He had selected for their palace in Venice, and their flat in London, Aubusson carpets, Gobelins, chests and chairs and cabinets of ancient shining wood. Chinese lacquer glowed like fire in dim corners; Ming cups and cloisonné vases shook the hearts of connoisseurs with envy. But though Hamilton had been able to do wonderful things with Gwendolen's money, he had never been able to do anything at all with Gwendolen. There she sat, placid, large and dull, as good as bread, in the middle of his life.

Hamilton would have liked to have very interesting people constantly in his house, but very interesting people have an awkward taste for being interested in their turn. They like seeing Aubusson carpets, but not more than once, and though they often appreciate good food, they prefer good conversation.

Gwendolen dressed well, she was without visible vulgarity, and the commonness of her mind was seldom exposed in the kind of society she preferred to frequent. It was unfortunate that the only person in her circle who realised that she would never say an intelligent thing should have been her husband.

Hamilton tried to comfort himself by remembering that if he hadn't liked Gwendolen for the good qualities he still knew she possessed, he wouldn't have married her; but the pity of it was that he would have liked her still if she had only sat at somebody else's table. It was having to deal with Gwendolen in such devastating quantities that wrecked his manners. She couldn't, for instance, for the life of her speak the truth; she didn't tell decisive or even defensive lies, but her slow, small mind only grasped elusive wisps of knowledge, and whatever came at her more solidly hurt her. She loved Hamilton with the kind of affection that choked the life out of him. There was no passion in her feeling for him, and no relief from its daily pressure. It was like being loved by a large moist sponge. If Gwendolen had been jealous or exacting, Hamilton would have been unfaithful to her without a qualm; but her trust in him was as large and unwavering as her affection. He could not face his self-respect and fail her. He had never wronged her by an overt act, but the whole of his nature went down under the cloud of its hate. He hunted about his mind for a way of escape like a mouse in a trap. He would have left her if it hadn't been for Henriette; but he adored his little girl, and though, in agonising moments, he feared she would grow up exactly like her mother, he shrank from the thought of leaving her unchallenged to pursue Gwendolen's example.

He thought of suicide with discomfort; although it was

a kind of relief to know that if the pressure of his marriage grew too much to bear, there was a way out of it. He also thought of Gwendolen's death; he couldn't help thinking of it; she was a little older than he was, and never took enough exercise. It was a fascinating subject, and came into his mind with the frequency of a favourite dream; but in his heart of hearts he knew that the more you wanted people to die, the less likely they were to oblige you, unless you helped them to do it. His thoughts stopped there — but not tranquilly, as a thought turns when it has plenty of margin, but abruptly, as if it had touched the edge of a precipice.

Hamilton was thirty-eight; he had the slim, alert figure of a boy, and Gwendolen was never tired of telling him how handsome he was, and of making him presents of

marvellous coloured pyjamas.

To say that marriage with Gwendolen had made him selfish would not have been true. Hamilton had been selfish before his marriage, but he had been attractive. Now he was merely more selfish and even to himself definitely less attractive.

'It would be too wonderful,' Gwendolen repeated, helping herself lavishly to butter, while she gazed inertly past Hamilton's head towards the Bay of Naples, 'to be upon that romantic little island, full of love stories together.'

'The kind of love story that Capri is renowned for,' said Hamilton drily, 'is the kind that you never permit

me to mention in your presence.'

Gwendolen looked a trifle pained, but not much; trying to hurt Gwendolen was like trying to send an arrow through a feather bed; you barely disturbed the feathers and never got through the mattress.

'I often wonder,' said Gwendolen with unusual audacity, 'what you would do if I had a love affair with

another man.'

'Do?' replied Hamilton grimly. 'I am afraid I should let "your slippery footsteps slide," my dear Gwendolen.

But why do you suggest a prospect so remote?'

Gwendolen flushed uneasily; she clung to the delusion that secretly Hamilton adored her; his brutality, she hoped, was only a bizarre form of masculine wit. Besides, even if he didn't love her, he was the man she had wanted to go round with — and she was going round with him.

'They say the Hotel Quisisana is quite comfortable,' Gwendolen went on after an uneasy pause; 'and there are all those grottoes. I don't know that I have ever been inside a grotto, and I feel I might like to have seen one, if they're safe and not too damp. Cook's say they don't ever have really bad things happen at Capri either, as they sometimes do in the South; and lately it's been so well arranged, they don't even murder each other.'

'I wonder what their alternative is!' Hamilton murmured under his breath. Aloud he said: 'I'm afraid I'm definitely off Capri, it's been beautiful too long. If you are bent on islands, why not try Ischia? I have heard nothing about it except that it has a volcano not yet extinct, but unobjectionable in its habits, and a sound

wine.'

'But the hotel, dear,' asked Gwendolen. 'If people don't go there much, don't you suppose it will be horrid?'

'I'm sometimes tired,' said Hamilton ferociously, 'of first-class hotels; they're run by invisible companies of brigands, and give you the least they dare for your money. Every soul in them is lost, and there's not even a personal devil to put pep into their damnation.'

'Dear, you know I don't like you to talk that wild way about the devil,' said Gwendolen anxiously; 'and I'm sure I've often met quite nice people in hotels. Last week the Burton Birdseyes from Detroit were here, and they

know your Aunt Mary.'

Hamilton groaned. 'That's just it!' he exclaimed.

'Well, you can make up your mind about one thing. I'm not going to Capri. I'll go and find out about the boats

for Ischia, if you like, instead.'

'Yes, dear, do,' said Gwendolen contentedly; 'and if we don't like it, we can always come back here. I think we'll leave Henriette behind with Miss Wade and Marie. The food here is better than most places, and Miss Wade doesn't like breaking up routine. It is such a comfort we have such safe people to leave the dear child with when we want to go off honeymooning by ourselves, isn't it?'

Hamilton rose; his keen blue eyes hardened, his heart contracted till it hurt him; but he was too civilised not to hold his tongue. If Gwendolen wouldn't understand how he loathed her, he could only bow ironically and walk off to make arrangements to carry out her wishes.

Gwendolen loved his capable way of making arrangements for their journeys; they were always perfect, even

when he didn't seem to care where he went.

The next day they left Naples at a convenient hour. The islands fluttered by like flocks of birds; Posilipo and Procida, wrapped in gold, drew between them and Naples. Slowly Ischia unfolded itself. The island rose up crookedly towards Mont' Epomeo and broke at its peak

into two jagged spars.

In front of the little port stood a huge rock covered with the ruins of a Roman citadel. The great rock brooded darkly in front of the harbour like a heavy bolt upon a door. The houses that crept down to the water's edge were bedraggled buildings, huddled together, covered with flakes of speckled paint. Olives and vines ran up the sides of the island as if they were in a panic trying to get away from the dulled edges of the sea; the trivial beaches were the unclean volcanic beaches of the South.

The dusk fell suddenly; they could not see the approach

to their hotel. A battered cab drove them in jerks and spasms up a hillside. Gwendolen said twice that it would be too lovely to get in and have some tea.

A door in a mass of darkness opened suddenly, and a man stood before them, blear-eyed, tousled, with shaking hands. His face was puffy and white, his eyelids red. He explained that he had reserved their rooms, but he made this concession without eagerness, as if it was the last thing he should have supposed they could have wanted. The rooms were the usual stone-tiled rooms of the South; they were clean and tolerable, and looked out onto a large terrace. Beneath the terrace the dark flow of the sea stretched into a more palpable darkness. Behind the hotel the shadow of Mont' Epomeo rose like a wall. Dry leaves flickered and rustled in gusts of low wind.

Hamilton stood there alone, smoking a cigarette. The hotel was empty except for themselves. He was sorry, because that meant more of Gwendolen, or at least a more unmitigated Gwendolen. Hamilton decided that he would explore the island to-morrow and then go back to Naples. The food was almost certain to be bad and

obviously everything else was.

Gwendolen looked at him significantly at dinner. The food was bad and they were served by the landlord, whose hands shook. 'Drink,' Gwendolen's eyes said, and Hamilton knew that when the landlord had left the room, she would say, 'Disgusting!'

The man's uneasy eyes touched Hamilton. Something, he could not tell what, made him want to shield the

landlord from Gwendolen's pat 'Disgusting!'

It came out just as he had expected, and Gwendolen added: 'We shall never be able to stay here, Hamilton. It's very third class. There's no bathroom! I don't know what Cook's mean by recommending an hotel without a bathroom; and it's fortunate we have our bicarbonate of soda with us, for how anyone can digest the food ——!'

'The wine's good,' said Hamilton defensively, 'and we'll see better what the island's like to-morrow.'

As there was nothing to do but talk to Gwendolen, Hamilton went to bed early. They had adjoining rooms, and both the windows opened onto the terrace. Flies, fleas, and tiny invisible mosquitoes made sleep impossible. As the night wore on, dogs barked riotously. They did not get over their excitement in a few accustomed volleys; they barked with an edge of urgency, and as if they dared not leave off.

Once a child screamed for a long time desperately, and no one intervened between it and its fear. Every now and then a gust of wind rushed down from the mountains with a howl as startling as the cry of a wolf, shook the house

and the dry leaves, and fell back baffled.

What happened outside Hamilton could more or less account for, but he couldn't account for the inexplicable noises in his room. There was a sound like cripples dancing close to his bed. Every now and then there would be a rush of stumbling footsteps from one side of the room to the other. Sometimes someone would fall down with a thud and a crash, and when Hamilton turned on the light, there was nothing to be seen, not even a leaf blown in from the terrace, only the bare clean floor and the naked, whitewashed walls.

At two o'clock he heard Gwendolen scream. He had never heard her scream before. It was a quavering, bleating sound with his name in it. He ran out through the open door into her room. She was sitting up in bed with the light on, her face, the mosquito netting, and the bed-clothes all one white agitated blur. Her placid eyes were agonised.

'Oh, Hamilton!' she gasped, 'I've had such an awful dream! I dreamt you were standing over me with a knife—with a knife, Hamilton! And then I woke up and heard something dripping close to me. But the floor is dry—

and yet I know I heard it dripping from the ceiling! Listen! Oh, listen!'

Hamilton listened, but there was no sound; the village below them had fallen silent, the air hung breathless,

nothing dripped from the cracked white ceiling.

'It's all right,' he said in a queer voice. His mouth felt as dry as if he had been drinking, and it was difficult to speak. 'You had a nightmare, that's all. These hot queer winds make one feel like the devil!'

Hamilton would have preferred to return to his invisible ghosts, but he was seldom callous to actual suffering, so he sighed, unpacked a novel, and lay down on the bed adjoining Gwendolen's.

'Go to sleep,' he said, 'if you can with the light on.

I'll read here for a bit.'

'I couldn't go to sleep with it off,' complained Gwendolen; 'but that dream was just too awful, Hamilton! How would it be if you were to mix me a little more bicarbonate of soda? I've never been in such a place; did you hear that child scream? And the dogs! and people shouting! — in such a horrid way. It made me think of the French Revolution.'

'They wake up at night in these Italian villages,'

explained Hamilton.

The dogs restarted their impassioned barking, but at least the cripples danced no more. Gwendolen slept at last. Hamilton got up and went out onto the terrace.

The first light was breaking over the sea, a pale and lurid light. Below the terrace was a tiny shaggy garden, under an umbrella pine. As the light grew stronger, Hamilton wandered down a flight of broken steps into the garden. Beneath the shade of the umbrella pine was a little circle of drawing-room chairs. They must have been left there for weeks; they looked curiously stranded and forlorn, stained by the weather and covered with cobwebs and dead leaves.

The island grew slowly more visible, the olives straggled up the hillside, their thin leaves quivering in the dawn wind. Again Hamilton caught a hint of panic, as if everything on the island were afraid. It was all fantastic nonsense. There he sat, secure in his expensive carminecoloured dressing-gown with its rough velvet cuffs — red morocco shoes on his feet, a slim gold cigarette-case in his hand. He thought of all his elaborate safeguards against physical discomfort, his gold and tortoise-shell fittings, his perfectly brushed and folded clothes, the hair tonics. mouth washes, and manicure instruments, which he used every day for his toilet; and then he thought of the little sprawling dirty villages clinging to the rocks with their air of unclean listlessness. Why should he stay in this place, with its sickening odours and its flies? Why on earth did he want to stay there? But he realised that he did want to stay: he wanted to see the puffy-faced landlord again with the haunted eyes, and he wanted to find out about the drawing-room chairs. There was something thrilling in the profound insecurity of the island.

He went back to bed and slept heavily until Henry brought him his coffee at nine o'clock. Henry had heard noises too, and he had discovered fleas. He was an old and privileged servant, and he urged upon Hamilton that they should all return by the next boat to Naples.

Hamilton let him return to Naples with Gwendolen and her French maid. 'I shall stay another day or two,' he

explained, 'and explore the island.'

Gwendolen objected more emphatically than was at all usual with her, but Hamilton waved her objections aside. It was an enormous relief to him when the boat moved off across the violet sea. The island was his own now — the odd, hot, savage air — the insecurity. He went back to the empty hotel with the liberated holiday feeling of a schoolboy.

On the terrace he was joined by the landlord. He had

evidently been drinking again, but he looked just as frightened.

Hamilton could speak Italian fluently, and his charming manners always put inferiors at their ease. Signor Farese began to talk, at first hesitatingly, and then with a kind of garrulous rush. He did not belong to Ischia, he explained, it was not his paese. He came from Milano. The war had caught him and ruined him, and they had had to come here because it was his wife's property. They couldn't sell it, so they must live on it. She came from Ischia. It was hers, all hers; the hotel, the podere with vines and olives, a big bit of land up on the mountain too.

They had no children — that was dreadful. To think of it, a marriage without children — like a garden without fruit! It made you lose heart.

Yes, the hotel was empty. There had been a bad storm, and all the summer guests had left in a hurry. There would be no one now but a chance traveller or two

until the spring.

It was a lonely place? Yes! You could say that. They often had queer storms, too. Hadn't the Signor heard? They had had a tidal wave once. The sea just got up — no one knew why — and ran at them, like a mad bull charging, and caught off a village, dragged the walls away, broke the roofs, sucked a hundred lives down, and ran back.

There was another curious thing once — a rock stream; that was a long time ago, in his wife's father's time. First a rock as big as a church came bounding down upon them from the old mountain, and after it torrents of stones — torrents! They broke everything they touched; half Casamicciola lay under those rocks. A great many lives lost, of course. You couldn't save yourself when the earth itself wanted to get rid of you.

They had earthquakes, too, but not bad earthquakes.

They just ripped up a house or two and shook people's hearts out. But no! one couldn't say they really suffered much from earthquakes. No doubt old Epomeo up there was a bad old mountain, but he was too old to do what he liked — that was some consolation.

'And what are the people of the island like?' Hamilton asked him.

The landlord looked at him askance. 'Oh, good people - good people enough - good patriots!' he muttered, and then, drawn by the sympathy in Hamilton's eyes, he leaned forward and whispered: 'Devils from hell! But can you wonder? Hell is very near! I don't say what lies under the earth, for I don't know; though what comes out of it hasn't been very pleasant for us on Ischia. No, no! I mean the islands! You noticed that one with the peak. and the pink-domed church? — you pass it on your right from Naples. There is a great stone castle above the village. It is a prison. People say always, as they pass it, "How picturesque!"—but those who go there in chains for many years, do they find it so? That bare rock — that large one to the south — but no, you can't see it till you climb a little. There is not a tree or a shrub on it: just the bare rock under the sky; that too is a prison, for the longsentence prisoners — those who have taken life, you understand. Thirty years they live there on that rock thirty years! Ah, no! they don't escape - the sea is too wide. But when they are free again, where should they come but here? They have no money, and they are used to islands.

'You go to-morrow and look at the people; look at the villages on the island. I come from Milano — I am not of this paese — but my wife was of this people.'

'I don't think I've seen your wife yet?' suggested

Hamilton.

The man's face crumpled up like a shaken table napkin; it turned as white too. 'Why should you see her?' he said at last between blue lips, after he had twice tried to speak and failed. 'She's been dead these three years.'

Hamilton did not express regret; as Signor Farese turned away, Hamilton knew that he himself had felt no regret. Once more a mad sensation of fellow-feeling seized Hamilton. The sunken eyes, the bowed, tremulous figure, roused in him a thrill of pity; but not only pity—the luck of the fellow! she'd been dead three years!

That afternoon Hamilton took the battered cab he had had the day before and set off to explore the island.

The next village to Casamicciola was smaller, more dirty, more curiously crumpled and inert. They drove beyond it through a country of olives, stones, and vines; a productive country, but without harmony. The land was contracted and deeply wrinkled; it had an unnatural air of uncouth deformity. The sea beating against its shores was dark as a bruised apple.

The next village was much larger, but it was just as poor. The doors opened on the streets, and the garbage-filled streets were the people's living-rooms; they sat there watching each other and slinking to and fro like half-starved, dishevelled cats. It was no wonder that they lived in the streets, for when Hamilton looked through their open doors, the flies were so thickly spread over the unmade beds that he could see nothing else.

After a few hours he dismissed the cab and took the path the driver had pointed out to him, by which he

could reach the summit of Epomeo.

But he never reached it. Halfway up, the heat and the dry, crumbling earth appalled him; everything about him crumbled; rocks cracked under his feet; if he put his hand upon the branch of a shrub, it broke under his touch. For the first time since he had married Gwendolen he found himself thinking of her with a kind of relief. She was at once so spotless and so solid. The only solid thing

which Hamilton could see from the slopes of Mont' Epomeo was the huge rock on which the convict prison was built. He could see quite plainly the sun boring its way through the hot white walls.

He hurried down and reached the hotel fevered and exhausted. The landlord brought his tea out for him on the terrace. He moved the table carefully into the light reflected from the sunset. His hands shook so much that the tea-things tinkled and rattled on the tray. A blood-

red light drank up the dull darkness of the sea.

'Yes,' the landlord continued, as if they were still carrying on their conversation of the morning. 'My wife owned all this! The *podere* up there on the mountain, several houses in the village, this hotel here, and one at Ischia. She was considered the match of the island. But property depreciates here, it is not what it was.' He hesitated, his eyes flickered away from the red light on the sea — they came back with an appealing air to rest on Hamilton's face.

'I had nothing!' he said under his breath, 'nothing! The war ruined me! It has ruined many—but not—per-

haps so much!' He turned and shuffled away.

Hamilton found his own hand shaking as he drank his tea. He didn't want to hear anything more about the landlord's wife, nor about the convict island. He sat very late upon the terrace; there was very little sound from the village, only an occasional whimpering gust from Mont' Epomeo; but the darkness troubled him.

He went to his bedroom at last and began to read; he

wished he hadn't sent Henry away.

At two o'clock, while he was still reading, he heard a shuffling footstep approach his door; the vague, fumbling knock that followed brought his heart fluttering against his side. He couldn't find his breath to cry, 'Who's there?'

The door opened slowly; it was the landlord, quite

drunk, and swaying against the wall. His shadow plunged onto the floor, and played menacingly between Hamilton and the bed.

'I've never been there!' he whispered confidentially, holding on to the wall with his hand. 'They never found out! No, no! I've never been on that island! I had nothing! I was not at home here! And she was — oh, such a woman — and there always seemed so much of her! I did it upstairs. It seemed to last forever; and after I thought it was all over, she ran about the room! When you came here, I saw you look at your lady. I must have, looked like that at her — for years before I thought of doing anything. I am not at home here — but the wine is good; and if you can't live anywhere else, you live where you can. I ought to know about the wine, for I've drunk it ever since — drunk enough to float an island! Yes, yes! That's one thing I will say — you can get good wine on Ischia!'

He lurched as suddenly out of the room as he had lurched into it.

Hamilton sat quite still; he could not move for a moment or two any more than if he had been frozen into his chair. He bowed his head at last between his hands and horror shook him.

But after a time he felt a strange relief. He had done nothing to Gwendolen.

The next morning Signor Farese did not appear at all. Hamilton paid his bill to the courier and took the first boat back to Naples.

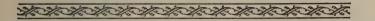
The sunshine filled him with relief, it was so bland and clean. He almost hurried up to Bertolini's. He wanted

to find out if Gwendolen was all right.

She was quite all right, and even more surprised than she was pleased when he suggested tentatively that they should repack and go for a day or two to Capri. He had had, he explained, enough of the other island.







THE WAITING-ROOM

ELAINE MARLOWE sat on the Rohns Terrasse and looked down over Göttingen. She had the timeless feeling that comes after a long journey. Everything had arrived safely and was put away and recovered from, and as she sat there, on that delicious May morning, she felt deeply, tenderly settled. The still, tranquil sunshine rested on her hands, on the newborn green of the beech leaves, as softly and unsubstantially as if the leaves and her hands were both transparent — light resting upon light.

Beneath her lay the little russet town dipped deep in gardens. The tall massive tower of the Jacobiokirche seemed to be pulling its heavy church up with it into the vague blue air. The German tower lacked the flying grace of an English spire or the slender stateliness of an Italian campanile, but it had a beauty and a vivid

strength all its own.

The twin towers of the Johanniskirche had never settled which of their quaint and obstinately unlike spires should really have been allowed to soar. They rose up above the solid grave old Rathaus in a perpetual silent strife, stone against stone. Elaine knew what the little squat high-roofed houses beneath them were like; all carved and painted, pillow-shaped wooden rollers over the doorways, steep bulging roofs, as if time like a wind was playing beneath them, drawing them in here, and furling them out there, above their timbered beams.

The windows looked out from overhanging eaves like

deep-set eyes from under frowning brows.

The narrow streets were still cobbled and full of youths with slashed faces, brave from recent duels, flying by on bicycles, their incredible saucer-shaped caps looking as if they must be gummed or growing out of their round-

shaped heads. There had been changes, of course, since she was here. These gentle, stiff, simple, and goodhumoured people, clean and honest like their Anglo-Saxon cousins, had flamed into monsters of iniquity for the rest of the world, and the rest of the world had seemed to them a herd of vindictive and wanton oppressors. There was a certain clumsiness about them. then as now, the clumsiness of the rigid mind, of the overdisciplined, unplastic will. Dick had once said to her: 'It's the fatality of the good mixed with the stupid. We all share it. We are good to ourselves, we are stupid to others, and out of our stupidity comes violence, suspicion, hate, cruelty, and panic. Wicked people get stopped, but a clumsy person does such unexpected things — you can't stop them; and when their intentions are good, too. they naturally won't stop themselves.'

This morning Elaine did not feel the war as she usually felt it — even now, after all these years, as a fresh weight of pity and horror. It seemed too remote from the lovely covering of the spring. She thought of the little town with love. An almost singing happiness filled her whole heart. She could not move her hand on the fluttering

white tablecloth without joy.

She had been alone for a long time without feeling in the least lonely; for the *Terrasse* was full of bird songs, and the occasional visits of bees and butterflies were personal matters. They carried with them on their wings

part of her happiness.

Suddenly she heard voices, and saw advancing along the *Terrasse* three very large and massive forms. A man with an immense red neck followed meekly by two large women, with very small hats above broad, smiling faces and strange clothes which seemed to have passed through centuries of fashion without taking from them so much as one coherent thought. Elaine was not as a rule very fond of large, loud people, but she had a peculiar sensation as

her eyes rested upon this advancing group. She felt an overwhelming desire to protect them, as if they were secretly afraid of something that she knew they needn't be afraid of, and she was touched by them - by their secret pathos — almost to tears. It was all the difference between seeing a note of music printed on a page and hearing it sound suddenly from some beautifully toned instrument. They were dreadfully real to her. They bore down upon Elaine, loud, beaming, with a quite curious physical solidity wedging their vast circumferences into the delicate light. She was thankful that there were empty tables on each side of her, because in spite of her sympathy she had a conflicting sense of being anxious to get out of their way. It was a curious guilty feeling as if she knew something that they had forgotten or had forgotten something which they knew.

They advanced yet nearer, their cheerful moving sounds enveloping her. They approached the table at which she sat as if she was not there. Elaine made a wavering gesture with her hands towards one of the empty tables. They didn't look at all angry or brutal, but they ignored her defensive gesture. They came straight up to her table and the most massive of the ladies sat down in Elaine's chair. It was then that Elaine realised that she was dead. She didn't have even to withdraw herself from the lady. She simply wasn't there. A thought had been there and the thought was gone.

Elaine felt as if she was plunging into a cold sea. A wash of unknown consciousness swept over her. It was startling to find that what she had supposed were her hand and her dress, the very lovely lines of the wisteriacoloured dress she had just bought in Paris, only existed when she herself suggested existence to them. What more might come to her — what more might leave her — unprotected by any walls of sense from the strange secrets of the universe?

When had she died? She remembered nothing about it. Ever since Dick's death she had been subject to recurrent attacks of breathlessness, for which the doctors had found various reasons and no remedies. They had been very distressing, but the last had been the least severe. She had thought it was going to be very bad,

when it had quite suddenly stopped.

But if she was dead, why was she at Göttingen? It was the last place she had ever allowed herself to think of. She had disciplined her clamorous mind so severely that the very name Göttingen had gone out of her consciousness. Those dreadful memories, which had fought day and night like wild beasts over her prostrate heart, had been driven away or lost. She never saw Göttingen even in her dreams. But now when memory deepened into reality, when she was left alone and unprotected face to face with it, she felt no pain. Nothing, not even the lonely coldness of the unknown, shook her deep central security.

She looked at the scene of her life's disaster without a pang. It had been such a silly little thing - plunging into the warm, untroubled sea of their happiness like the swift, unseen fin of a murderous shark! They were utterly wrapped up in each other; and with the years this condition of their love had deepened and grown safe about them. Their perfect marriage was the secret exasperation of those less fortunate than themselves, and the torch of hope to the inexperienced and the romantic. They never really quarrelled. Their hottest discussions had a mild unreality about them; they knew that no difference of opinion could shake the continuity of their love. Behind all possible differences they were always - just Elaine and Dick. And Elaine was the whole world to Dick and Dick the whole world to Elaine. Nothing but an accident could happen to them.

If she could possibly help it - after the time when

she thought of nothing else — Elaine never allowed herself to remember the cause of their quarrel. But she let herself remember it now with a smile of tenderness for such foolishness. They had quarrelled as to which of their mothers they should visit first on their return to England. Both of them were attached to their mothers and to each other's mother.

There had never been an instant's difficulty about these fortunate relationships. Dick's mother thought Elaine as perfect for Dick as any young woman, not his mother, could be. Elaine's mother thought Dick the pick of all possible husbands for her unique Elaine.

But though these relationships were ideal and needed very little keeping up, the affection of these desirable mothers-in-law for each other was distinctly less ideal. Elaine's mother often thought that it was really extraordinary that such a delightful son-in-law as Dick should have such a grasping, exacting mother, and Dick's mother felt it little less than a miracle that so satisfactory a daughter-in-law as Elaine could have been produced by a jealous, scheming woman like Elaine's mother. Both of them loved having their children to stay with them and neither of them liked their children staying with the other mother.

Elaine's mother was delicate; special consideration was due to her on this account. Dick's mother lived nearer the Channel Ports and was slightly the more unreasonable of the two old ladies. What Elaine feared, but unfortunately had not said, was that if they visited Dick's mother first, her mother would allow the fine gold of Dick's image to become dimmed. It was for Dick's reputation Elaine was secretly fighting. Dick felt the same about Elaine and his mother and it was for Elaine's white record that he fought.

Neither of them suspected that in the other this exquisite care for the Beloved's character was the root of a preposterous claim. Both credited the other with incredible and thick-witted selfishness, heightened by unreasoning obstinacy. So they had sat and quarrelled in the warm May sunshine - how many years ago! passionately dear to each other, wildly hurt, and hurting back as wildly! There was no reason for it at all. Neither of them cared in the least which mother they visited first. Neither of them stopped to find out whether this hated thing they were fighting in a mask was after all nothing but the beloved face which they would die to save. They said terrible things to each other. Finally Dick, who was most sensitive to the power of words, and secretly knew his mother to be the more unreasonable of the two. got up and said, 'I can't stand any more of this! I shall go for a walk alone. We can settle our plans when I return!' and Elaine had said icily, 'Do, if you wish!' instead of 'Darling, let's do whatever you like!' which had lain so close to the other speech that she hardly knew which she had said, till afterwards.

They were sitting in the Theaterplatz under a copper beech; against its bronzed dull red a clever waiter had set pots of scarlet geraniums. The sun played through the dark metallic lustre of the beech leaves, and flamed on the broad fiery petals of the geraniums. Memory went on unflinchingly now, and quite without that cold terror Elaine had always felt as she approached any of the avenues of thought down which she might catch a

glimpse of the Arch-Fear.

Dick stepped onto the road without looking, without perhaps caring, and a great car swooped out of the white distance, caught him, and killed him before her eyes. There had been no time for a word, or a smile, no time for anything but the interminable fussy ministrations of the Göttingen authorities. They had all been kind. She was able, borne up by the wings of disaster, to remember what Dick would have liked, to give them as

little trouble as possible, and as much recognition of their kindness.

The shipwreck came afterwards. And now she didn't mind thinking even about that! Curious! How long the journey must have been, and she was dead, and this was Göttingen! Why was she here? Was it because she was a criminal and had killed him and so must always haunt the scene of her crime? But wasn't it the murdered. more often than the murderer, who was to be found there? Ah! if it only could be! If only for a fraction of what she supposed must be Eternity, she could see him face to face! This had been her perpetual human longing, only to know that he existed, only to know where he was! But she nourished no illusions. Dick had not returned to her. She had found him neither among the Living nor among the Dead, if there were any other dead. She felt lonely now — conscious that she had lost not only Dick but everybody else — even the human beings she saw weren't so human to her as when she was human to them.

She knew now why her heart had gone out to the Germans who came to her table, and why she was sorry for them. What she had wanted to tell them was that Death was not dreadful. What she wanted to express to them was that she was much more like them than she had ever known, she was almost part of them, only when one was alive one did not understand that all living things were the same; and that to hurt each other was to hurt oneself.

Dick had always told her thoughts were things and she realised now how true his particular theory had been. Her thoughts — which she felt hadn't yet begun to grow or change to meet the new condition she was in — were still clothed with familiar appearances. She had her human form when she thought about it, not when she didn't. She smelt, saw, heard, felt, not with the organs

of sense, but out of one intangible sense which gave her everything, a unity that space no longer controlled nor was time concerned in it.

She said to herself: 'I will walk to the Theaterplatz,' but she was conscious that she didn't walk there. She was there, just as if she chose to think about it, she was in the Rohns Terrasse, and at the same time. It was not confusing because automatically what you did not think of ceased to exist—you saw only what you selected to see.

Once one was in one place at one time, now one was always - everywhere; and it was less strange than that once one could only go from one room to another. She saw the copper beech, and close to the bright geraniums, with their old sun-warmed scent, were the rows of little white tables. She thought of herself as she had been eight years ago and she no longer wore the wisteria dress, but a lovely pale grev-green garment Dick had chosen for her, with a flame-coloured crêpe de chine hat. She thought methodically of the very shoes and stockings, the emerald ring on her ungloved hand. She wondered if she was smiling the same smile, the last one she had not had to smile on purpose. She thought she would find the table where they had had iced coffee - and the quarrel. Perhaps God had sent her here simply to lay the ghost of that quarrel forever, and to lay ghosts you had to go through everything that made the ghost rise.

She found the table. It was the lunch hour and none of the tables were empty. Some one was sitting at hers. But in a moment she remembered it didn't really matter. She saw Them, but quite obviously from the Rohns Terrasse episode — They didn't see her. If she spoke to Them, it was like the murmur of summer bees, and if she touched Them, they thought it only the wind against their cheeks.

She could without disturbing her fellow guest sit

down, and, blotting him out of her line of vision, relive her memories until she had brought them all safely into the strange peace. But when she reached the table he had seen her. He rose and their eyes met. She supposed it was their eyes. For she saw Dick, saw him again as if it was just now — only just now, that they were swept apart by Death — by that silly little thing — now passed away forever.

She said what had lain in her heart and almost on her lips ever since. 'Ah, Dick, where were you all the time?' And he said, 'My darling, I never left here, I just waited.'

THE END











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